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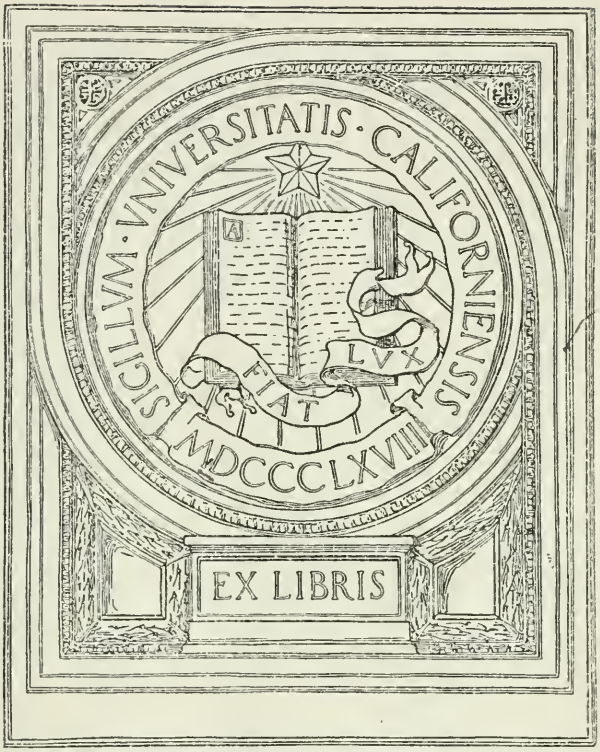
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WORDSWORTH'S

LITERARY CRITICISM

EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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Late Fellow of New College, Oxford

LONDON

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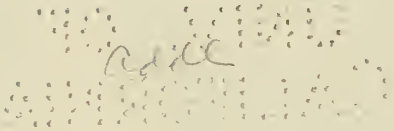

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INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth did not write much prose, but he wrote enough to make one inquire why he did not write more. He lived to be eighty, in full possession at least of those faculties which are requisite for producing ephemeral literature. Wholly uninterested in the gossip, the personal and party trivialities, which almost exhaust the definition of politics for the majority of those who read or write the newspapers, he nevertheless took a keen interest in the larger aspects of public affairs, in the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the Abolition of Slavery, Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, the Poor Law, Factories, Education. He held his views strongly, and had the didactic spirit. He was no student of philosophical writers, nor trained in philosophical method; but the bent of his mind was philosophical. Facts, whether in history or within the scope of his personal experience, were of interest to him solely so far as they suggested or illustrated principles: but he had the poet's distinctive habit of embodying principles in concrete facts. He was, as his poems show, and as he stated in no ambiguous terms, before all things desirous of teaching those principles which he held himself.

Here, then, is one answer to our inquiry, which

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may at first sight seem sufficient. His poetry is his teaching. His life was devoted to the cultivation and the use of this great gift, of which he was as seriously and reverentially conscious as a prophet or a saint may be of his mission. And this would be a sufficient answer, if, like Tennyson, he had written practically no prose, or had died young, like Keats. But his output in prose, though small, is not inconsiderable. As a young man, filled with the hopes engendered by the beginning of the French Revolution, he published an open letter to Bishop Watson of Llandaff, in defence of republican principles (1793). In 1798 appeared the *Lyrical Ballads*, with its short preface or Advertisement, which is the first of the writings belonging to the class of literary criticism, which form the contents of the present volume. The second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* with a long preface appeared in 1800, and to the third edition in 1802 was added an Appendix on Poetic Diction. In 1808–9 the Convention of Cintra evoked a political pamphlet, comparable to the great pamphlets of Burke in length, in earnestness, in intellectual grasp, even at times in eloquence, though far inferior in arrangement, fluency, and the mastery which comes from experience. In the same year Wordsworth contributed a moral essay to *The Friend*, dealing with the question, raised by an article of 'Christopher North', signed 'Mathetes', of the spiritual and intellectual dangers which beset ardent and intelligent youth on its entrance into the world

of manhood. In the following year (1810) he wrote an introduction to a book of views of the scenery of the English Lakes, which was subsequently enlarged and published separately. This is not a guide-book in the complete modern sense; but it is not merely the best guide to the appreciation of the scenery which it describes, and the source of much that is best in more recent guide-books, but the best account in existence of the principles, if we may speak so, of mountainous landscape [1]. In 1810 also Wordsworth wrote an essay in three parts, *On Epitaphs*, of which the first part appeared in *The Friend*, and the others would have appeared if *The Friend* had not come to a premature end. In 1811 he wrote, in the form of a letter to the author, a critique on Captain Pasley's *Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire*, with reference to the Napoleonic War. This was first published in the *Memoirs* edited by his nephew, Christopher Wordsworth, after his death. In 1814 and 1815 he added to his critical writings by the preface to *The Excursion*, and that to the two volumes of collected *Poems* [2], together with a supplementary essay on the relation between

[1] In saying this I do not forget Ruskin, who has written in his *Modern Painters* about mountains with a far more gorgeous and elaborate eloquence than Wordsworth could have used. But the very splendour of Ruskin's style, as well as his lack of a firm control over his emotions, makes him less of a guide or philosopher than of a prophet or inspirer of noble passions.

[2] A third volume was added to this edition in 1820 by the republication in one volume of various poems published between that date and 1815.

the merits of poems and their popularity, immediate and remote. The notes to *The River Duddon*, published in 1820, contained a memoir of the Rev. Robert Walker ('Wonderful Walker'), which deserves a substantive place among Wordsworth's prose works as one of the most beautiful pieces of biography in the language. In 1816 he wrote his remarkable *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, which, though abundantly illustrated by his poems, may be commended to those who, on a superficial view, are inclined to subscribe to the judgement, so comforting to the self-respect of many dabblers in literature, that Wordsworth was something of a prig. Two years later he issued two *Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland*, in support of the Government and in opposition to the candidature of Mr. (afterwards Lord Chancellor) Brougham. His next prose writing of a public character, though it was not published till after his death, was a long letter to Bishop Blomfield against the Catholic Relief Bill of 1829. In 1835 he wrote a Postscript to his poems, in which he dealt with the Poor Law, with joint-stock companies, and with the question of the supply of clergy to meet the vast increments of population, especially in the north of England. In 1836 he laid the foundation-stone of new schools at Bowness, and gave an address upon education, of which he subsequently wrote a version for the local press. In 1838 he published a letter in the *Kendal Mercury* in answer to a petition against Serjeant

Talfourd's 'Copyright Bill', a bill in the inception of which he took a considerable part. Finally in 1844, in his seventy-fifth year, he wrote two letters to the *Morning Post*, protesting against the proposal to bring a railway from Kendal to Penrith through the heart of the Lake Country. To this list ought perhaps to be added the Notes to his own poems, especially those dictated late in life to Miss Fenwick, and some of the letters, written to individuals, but, like those to Bishop Blomfield and Captain Pasley, evoked not by private occasions but by public affairs, such as his correspondence with Serjeant Talfourd and others on Copyright.

Wordsworth's correspondence does, in fact, partake largely of the character of essay-writing. No doubt when the long-hoped-for edition of his *Letters* appears, we shall find the proportion of familiar letters increased. But he was, as he often tells us, no letter-writer by predilection: consequently he does not, like Lamb or Cowper, spin his webs spontaneously out of nothing; unless his letter is an answer due to his correspondent, it is usually written with the definite purpose of discussing some question either of public moment or of literary criticism. And the same fact which made him a reluctant letter-writer accounts, perhaps as much as his self-devotion to poetry, for the comparative paucity of his prose works. The physical operation of writing was hateful to him. A letter to Sir George Beaumont, written in his thirty-fourth year,

reads almost like one of Coleridge in its record of the poet's delay in writing to acknowledge the munificent gift which was its occasion. In the course of it he writes: 'I do not know from what cause it is, but during the last three years I have never had a pen in my hand for five minutes, before my whole frame becomes one bundle of uneasiness; a perspiration starts out all over me, and my chest is oppressed in a manner which I cannot describe. This is a sad weakness; for I am sure, though it is chiefly owing to the state of my body, that by exertion of mind I might in part control it' (*Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 262). Similarly, in his forty-first year, to Captain Pasley: 'I am ashamed to say, that I write so few letters, and employ my pen so little in any way, that I feel both a lack of words (such words, I mean, as I wish for) and of mechanical skill, extremely discouraging to me' (*Memoirs*, i. 407). Again in 1831, during the discussions of the Reform Bill, in which Wordsworth took a great and painfully apprehensive interest, he was urged by his friends, in the words of his biographer, 'to exercise those powers, in writing on public affairs, which he had displayed twenty years before, in his *Essay on the Convention of Cintra*.' He would evidently have been only too glad to accede to this request; but he was now in his sixty-second year, and felt unequal to the task. He adds: 'There is yet another obstacle: I am no ready master of prose-writing, having been little practised in the art.'

If Wordsworth's bent had been primarily towards prose-writing instead of poetry, he would undoubtedly have overcome his dislike for the mechanical process of committing his thoughts to paper; and the physical discomforts which that process caused him would very likely not have occurred. The latter were very natural in a man who practically lived out of doors and had never been subject to the practice of sedentary habits usual to persons of his position and of his intellectual interests. As is well known, he composed his poems almost wholly in the open air, and wrote the great bulk of them, as well as many of his letters, by the hands of others, his sister, his wife, and other members of his household. Such a method, possible even for poetical composition only when the poet can depend upon the unfailing sympathy of willing amanuenses, would obviously be almost impossible, except under the condition of physical necessity, for the composition of any extensive works in prose.

Wordsworth himself desired that his prose works should be collected and edited after his death—a wish that was not fulfilled till the edition of Dr. Alexander Grosart in 1876. But from the quotations given above it will be obvious that the poet made no claim to a place among the great prose-writers of his country. He devoted far more labour to the workmanship of his poetry than is often supposed; but he paid little attention to the style of his prose, other than that which every sensible man pays with

the object of conveying his meaning clearly and forcibly to the reader's understanding. The result is instructive in two ways. On the one hand, Wordsworth's prose moves, on the whole, with too uniform and ponderous a tread to exercise upon the reader that indefinable but real thing, the charm of style. It does not sparkle, though it very often glows. It retains the interest by its force of thought, but does not stimulate curiosity. There are no unexpected turns, no sudden side-peeps; no relief from the strenuous march of progress towards the goal. There is fine scorn, exalted passion, but none of the lighter sallies of wit and humour. And in the mere structure of sentences and paragraphs there is often a certain labour of effort to be clear which demands a corresponding labour in the reader to catch the meaning. The last of these drawbacks is obviously a mere matter of practice; the others are far more so than many critics would admit. No doubt the root of every quality of an author's style must be in himself; and the strongest roots and most deeply set in Wordsworth's nature were of a serious, strenuous, and self-centred character. But he was by no means devoid of humour; and a greater mastery of the machinery of prose-writing would have freed his mind to move with greater rapidity over his field of thought and with more readiness to receive various and casual impressions, just as a practised walker over his loved hillsides obtains, half-unconsciously, many more

various and casual impressions of beauty than one who is forced to pay constant attention to his footing.

On the other hand, no better instance than Wordsworth's prose could be found of the value of sincerity in writing, in other words of having something which you want to say, and, to use a favourite phrase of his, of writing 'with your eye on the object'. Wordsworth used prose simply as a means to an end; and nobody need open one of his essays with the mere idle curiosity to see 'what sort of stuff it is'. But if you are interested in the subject on which he writes, it is safe to say that your interest will be increased by what he writes about it. Of the *Essay upon Epitaphs* Hartley Coleridge said, 'It shows that if Wordsworth had not been a great poet, he might have been a great prose-writer.' This, I think, is quite true; but at the same time, the *Essay upon Epitaphs* is the least impressive of his important prose works, is less cogent and original in thought and expression than the *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*, the *Description of the Lake Country*, or the *Prefaces* to the poems. And this inferiority is due to the fact that, as a whole, the essay has not the same practical object as the other works; the thought and the expression are not, except in certain passages, fused into one by the heat of the writer's desire to convince and to persuade.

Wordsworth's writing was, like his character,

absolutely sincere; and his life was devoted to poetry. It follows inevitably that his prose is a poet's prose. In spite of its plain straightforwardness, of the absence of conscious ornament or artifice, of its frequently cumbrous movement, its long argumentation, its constant reference to principles, its laborious care in exposition, and its didactic insistence, one can never lose the feeling that it is a poet's prose. For an illustration we will turn not to the *Description of the Lake Country*, which in its very subject-matter bears an obvious affinity to one of the commonest functions of poetry, nor one of the *Prefaces* which deal with poetic principles and may be expected to be tinged with poetic language, but the *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*. This is how that pamphlet opens:

The Convention, recently concluded by the Generals at the head of the British army in Portugal, is one of the most important events of our time. It would be deemed so in France, if the Ruler of that country could dare to make it public with those merely of its known bearings and dependencies with which the English people are acquainted; it has been deemed so in Spain and Portugal as far as the people of those countries have been permitted to gain, or have gained, a knowledge of it; and what this nation has felt and still feels upon the subject is sufficiently manifest. Wherever the tidings were communicated, they carried agitation along with them—a conflict of sensations in which, though sorrow was predominant, yet, through force of scorn, impatience, hope, and indignation, and through the

universal participation in passions so complex, and the sense of power which this necessarily included—the whole partook of the energy and activity of congratulation and joy. Not a street, not a public room, not a fireside in the island which was not disturbed as by a local or private trouble; men of all estates, conditions, and tempers where affected apparently in equal degrees. Yet was the event by none received as an open and measurable affliction: it had indeed features bold and intelligible to every one; but there was an under-expression which was strange, dark, and mysterious—and, accordingly as different notions prevailed, or the object was looked at in different points of view, we were astonished like men who are overwhelmed with forewarning—fearful like men who feel themselves to be helpless, and indignant and angry like men who are betrayed. In a word, it would not be too much to say that the tidings of this event did not spread with the commotion of a storm which sweeps visibly over our heads, but like an earthquake which rocks the ground under our feet.

Not more conspicuously in this passage than on almost every page of Wordsworth's prose, the language is more highly charged with metaphor, recalls a greater number of concrete images, and deals with a wider range of epithets, than is usual with writers of prose who are not also poets.

It is not my purpose in introducing Wordsworth's critical writings to the reader to discuss at full length either their antecedents or the principles which they were intended to uphold. With regard to their antecedents, the Preface to the *Lyrical*

Ballads explains them clearly enough for any one who is fairly acquainted with the English poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and no amount of explanation will make them clear to any one who is not. The whole of our modern attitude towards nature and towards the art of interpreting nature through language has been so largely created by Wordsworth and Coleridge and by later writers, in most respects dissimilar, but all profoundly influenced by these two, such as Shelley and Keats, Ruskin and Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and Browning, that Wordsworth's polemic is necessarily in part unreal to us except in an historic sense. We may know what 'gaudiness and inane phraseology' mean without travelling back out of the twentieth century; but we do not know quite what it meant to Wordsworth unless we know something of the typical verse of the eighteenth century, of the Popes without Pope's wit, the Johnsons without Johnson's vigour, the Grays without Gray's taste, the Cowpers without Cowper's sincerity. We have no lack of novels to which the expression 'frantic' might be applied, though 'silly' would perhaps characterize them better; but the 'sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse,' which moved Wordsworth to an unusually acrimonious tone, have long become invisible in the dark backward and abysm of time.

The positive part of Wordsworth's critical writings,

the statement of his principles, is far more important; but it raised so much discussion that it is out of the question to deal with it in any detail here. I must content myself with indicating a few of what seem to me the most important points, and with a word or two of caution against attributing to Wordsworth opinions which he never held.

At the same time it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that Wordsworth did not profess to put forward a system of 'Poetics', but that his critical writings have almost all a direct reference to his own poetry and only to certain parts or aspects of that. 'The majority of' the *Lyrical Ballads* are described in the Advertisement as 'experiments', and that Advertisement, and the Preface of 1800 into which it grew, as well as the Appendix on Poetic Diction of 1802, are primarily and in their main intention an explanation of the principles upon which those experiments are based. They constitute, in essence, that plea for a 'return to Nature', i.e. to truth and sincerity of thought and statement, of feeling and expression, which the liability of mankind to fall under the yoke of fashions and *formulae* evokes from all vigorous and independent writers. The *Lyrical Ballads* themselves triumphantly vindicated their existence; for it must be remembered that the very eagerness of the Edinburgh Reviewers and others to stamp out the infection of Wordsworth's style is a testimony, amply supported by the positive evidence of Coleridge and of the verse produced in

the early years of the nineteenth century, to the powerful influence which those poems exerted even from the first. The *Apologia*, therefore, of Wordsworth's prose was perhaps superfluous; but in relation to the Ballads to which it was intended to apply it was just, and justified by the success of the poems themselves.

If Wordsworth had known how much importance would be attached to his exposition of poetical principles and how much discussion would arise about them, he would probably have been more guarded in some of his expressions. Thus the Advertisement, after stating that the majority of the *Lyrical Ballads* were to be considered as experiments, proceeds:

> They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, &c.

If this passage were taken in its natural sense, it would imply that the language of conversation in the upper class was different from that shared by the middle and lower classes; that it had hitherto been the exclusive language of poetry; and that it was frequently characterized by gaudiness and inane phraseology. Wordsworth, of course, meant nothing so ridiculous. He did not imagine that the peers, for instance, conversed in the language of Gray's *Ode on*

Spring. He was unconsciously attempting to say two things at once: on the one hand, that the men and women of his ballads were drawn from the middle and lower classes; on the other, that his language was that of conversation. Accordingly in the Preface, substituted for the Advertisement, in the edition of 1800, he writes:

> The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men.

But though the Preface removes an obvious confusion of language, it brings into relief a real confusion of thought. It is unnecessary here to discuss the subject in detail, as that has been done by Coleridge in a part of the *Biographia Literaria* which no reader of Wordsworth can afford to neglect. It is enough to point out that the two statements, with which Coleridge joined issue, and which cannot possibly be defended, were, one, to the effect that the language of men in 'humble and rustic life' had a special virtue as a vehicle of poetic thought from its own directness and from the unsophisticated character of such men (Pref. pp. 45, 48–49); the other, that 'there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and [that of] metrical composition'.

Let us again remind ourselves that Wordsworth's theories take their start from the particular class

of poems of which 'the majority' of the *Lyrical Ballads* are specimens. Wordsworth was convinced that the language of poetry should be that of truth and sincerity, not a conventionally decorative jargon, and that the subject-matter of the noblest poetry should be neither the wild and fantastic absurdities or the pseudo-aristocratic inanities of fashionable romance, nor the highly artificial emotions and the narrowly rationalistic thought of the 'polite society', which was bred on a degenerating tradition of the age of Anne, but 'the great and simple affections of our nature' (p. 50), or as he elsewhere expresses it:

> Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
> And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blessed consolations in distress;
> Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
> Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
> Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
> Inviolate retirement, subject there
> To Conscience only, and the law supreme
> Of that Intelligence which governs all.
>
> (From *The Recluse*, quoted in Pref. to *Excursion*.)

These convictions are illustrated in one branch of poetry by the *Lyrical Ballads*, just as we may say that the Virgilian point of view is exemplified by the *Eclogues*; but they are no less illustrated by the most splendid and elaborate of Wordsworth's poems, such as the famous *Ode*, the *Lines written near Tintern Abbey*, *Laodamia*, or the *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge*, or that *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*. Wordsworth had not trained

himself in philosophical severity of reasoning, and, while he was led on by his argument far beyond the immediate scope of justifying a few 'experiments' in the poetry of 'humble and rustic life', he still was affected and warped in his judgement by the idea that in such a ballad as *We are Seven* he had given as it were the *formula* for poetic composition.

The other portion of Wordsworth's critical writings, which has become celebrated from the discussion which it raised, is the distinction between Fancy and Imagination which forms the subject of the Preface to the edition of 1815. As a description of the functions of those two faculties in poetic composition, the passage deserves the epithet of 'masterly' which Coleridge bestowed upon it[1]; it is only when the distinction is made the basis of a classification of poems that its usefulness is lost in the clouds of mist which it engenders. Such an intimate friend as Henry Crabb Robinson, who several times recurs to the subject in his diaries, was never able to master this key; and it is said that the poet himself could be teased by being puzzled with the question whether such or such a poem would be found in the one class or in the other. He had himself attempted to 'guard against the possibility of misleading' by pointing out that 'certain poems are placed according to the powers of mind, in the Author's conception,

[1] *Biog. Lit.* (Bohn), p. 44. At p. 138 Coleridge modifies his approval, at the same time promising a more philosophical definition. This, however, was one of the many promised works of Coleridge which had no fulfilment.

predominant in the production of them; *predominant*, which implies the exertion of other faculties in less degree'. But, although a study of the poems from this point of view is interesting, it may be doubted whether the attempt to separate them into two compartments has not on the whole tended to obscure the distinction which Wordsworth so effectively enunciated and illustrated in the Preface.

There are many other points of interest in Wordsworth's critical writings, notably many records of the impressions left upon his independent and retentive mind by the poetry of those of his predecessors in whom he took an interest. Many more of these records are contained in the various 'memoirs' and 'reminiscences' in which so much of his conversation is, in substance, preserved. It is easy to catch him tripping in historical detail[1],

[1] Prof. Saintsbury (*History of Criticism*, iii. 202) calls attention to an obvious inaccuracy in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (see below, p. 13), where Wordsworth contrasts 'the age of Catullus, Terence, and Lucretius' with 'that of Statius or Claudian' [Prof. Saintsbury adds an error by substituting 'and' for 'or'], and 'the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher' with 'that of Donne and Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope'. As Professor Saintsbury points out, Donne 'was the elder of Fletcher probably by six or seven years, of Beaumont by ten or twelve'. Professor Saintsbury's account of Wordsworth's critical writings, though acute and clever in its happy-go-lucky way, suffers, as it seems almost inevitable that the work of one who takes all literary knowledge for his province must suffer, from superficiality and the undue prominence given to certain aspects. Of course *quot homines, tot sententiae*; but, as a result of many years' study of Wordsworth, I must record my conviction that Professor Saintsbury very much exaggerates the 'doggedness' and '*pique*' which he supposes to have been at the bottom of the poet's critical heresy.

and to convict him of partial knowledge and, consequently, of prejudiced views. But on the whole, if we are not content with a cursory inspection of his prose writings, but examine with them the records just mentioned, and if we remember that he neither was, nor pretended to be, a regular man of letters, we shall probably learn to respect not only the sincerity of his judgement, which has never been called in question, but its breadth and essential soundness as well. He often provokes disagreement; but he always stimulates thought. He palms off on you no mere counters of compliment or generality, but coins from his own mint. From the pages of his prose, as from his poetry, breathes the fresh, keen air of a mind, like the mountains of his home, rugged, often more bleak than beautiful, lofty, but not perpetually 'drenched in empyrean light', rooted not only in quiet valleys, but also in deep waters, solid, unpretentious, free.

Wordsworth had, as Coleridge and others have recorded, a certain doggedness in his strong character: but any one who considers the amount of alterations which he made in his poems in consequence of the criticism of others, will allow that he had his obstinacy under effective control. Wordsworth's letters, further, show that he did not adopt his views of poetic diction out of *pique*, and that he had too proud a consciousness of his destiny as a poet to be inspired by this motive, which Professor Saintsbury attributes to him for no better reason than that he expressly disclaims it. It is possible to take too cynical a view of human nature. Among recent books, Professor Raleigh's examination of Wordsworth's theories is, to my mind, much more thorough and more just than Professor Saintsbury's.

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The second and third essays on Epitaphs are reprinted by permission of Mr. D. McDowall Grosart.

ADVERTISEMENT TO LYRICAL BALLADS (1798)

It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics, but in those of Poets themselves.

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. It is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favourable to the author's wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision.

Readers of superior judgement may disapprove of the style in which many of these pieces are executed; it must be expected that many lines and phrases will not exactly suit their taste. It will perhaps appear to them, that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity. It is apprehended that the more conversant the reader is with our elder writers, and with those in modern times who have been the most successful in painting manners and passions, the fewer complaints of this kind will he have to make.

An accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced reader from judging for himself; but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest that if poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous, and that in many cases it necessarily will be so.

The tale of *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* is founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire. Of the other poems in the collection, it may be proper to say that they are either absolute inventions of the author, or facts which took place within his personal observation or that of his friends. The poem of *The Thorn*, as the reader will soon discover, is not supposed to be spoken in the author's own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently show itself in the course of the story. *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* was professedly

written in imitation of the *style*, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets; but with a few exceptions, the Author believes that the language adopted in it has been equally intelligible for these three last centuries. The lines entitled *Expostulation and Reply*, and those which follow, arose out of conversation with a friend who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy.

LETTER TO JOHN WILSON
(CHRISTOPHER NORTH)

(1800)

My dear Sir,

Had it not been for a very amiable modesty you could not have imagined that your letter could give me any offence. It was on many accounts highly grateful to me. I was pleased to find that I had given so much pleasure to an ingenious and able mind, and I further considered the enjoyment which you had had from my Poems as an earnest that others might be delighted with them in the same, or a like manner. It is plain from your letter that the pleasure which I have given you has not been blind or unthinking; you have studied the poems, and prove that you have entered into the spirit of them. They have not given you a cheap or vulgar pleasure; therefore I feel that you are entitled to my kindest thanks for having done some violence to your natural diffidence in the communication which you have made to me.

There is scarcely any part of your letter that does not deserve particular notice; but partly from some constitutional infirmities, and partly from certain habits of mind, I do not write any letters unless

upon business, not even to my dearest friends. Except during absence from my own family I have not written five letters of friendship during the last five years. I have mentioned this in order that I may retain your good opinion, should my letter be less minute than you are entitled to expect. You seem to be desirous of my opinion on the influence of natural objects in forming the character of Nations. This cannot be understood without first considering their influence upon men in general, first, with reference to such objects as are common to all countries; and, next, such as belong exclusively to any particular country, or in a greater degree to it than to another. Now it is manifest that no human being can be so besotted and debased by oppression, penury, or any other evil which unhumanizes man, as to be utterly insensible to the colours, forms, or smell of flowers, the [voices] and motions of birds and beasts, the appearances of the sky and heavenly bodies, the general warmth of a fine day, the terror and uncomfortableness of a storm, &c. &c. How dead soever many full-grown men may outwardly seem to these things, all are more or less affected by them; and in childhood, in the first practice and exercise of their senses, they must have been not the nourishers merely, but often the fathers of their passions. There cannot be a doubt that in tracts of country where images of danger, melancholy, grandeur, or loveliness, softness, and ease prevail, that they will make themselves felt powerfully in forming the characters of the people, so as to produce an uniformity or national character, where the nation is small and is not made up of men who, inhabiting different soils, climates, &c., by their civil usages and relations materially interfere with each other. It was so formerly, no doubt, in the Highlands of Scotland; but we cannot perhaps observe much

of it in our own island at the present day, because, even in the most sequestered places, by manufactures, traffic, religion, law, interchange of inhabitants, &c., distinctions are done away, which would otherwise have been strong and obvious. This complex state of society does not, however, prevent the characters of individuals from frequently receiving a strong bias, not merely from the impressions of general nature, but also from local objects and images. But it seems that to produce these effects, in the degree in which we frequently find them to be produced, there must be a peculiar sensibility of original organization combining with moral accidents, as is exhibited in *The Brothers* and in *Ruth*; I mean, to produce this in a marked degree; not that I believe that any man was ever brought up in the country without loving it, especially in his better moments, or in a district of particular grandeur or beauty without feeling some stronger attachment to it on that account than he would otherwise have felt. I include, you will observe, in these considerations, the influence of climate, changes in the atmosphere and elements, and the labours and occupations which particular districts require.

You begin what you say upon *The Idiot Boy*, with this observation, that nothing is a fit subject for poetry which does not please. But here follows a question, Does not please whom? Some have little knowledge of natural imagery of any kind, and, of course, little relish for it; some are disgusted with the very mention of the words pastoral poetry, sheep or shepherds; some cannot tolerate a poem with a ghost or any supernatural agency in it; others would shrink from an animated description of the pleasures of love, as from a thing carnal and libidinous; some cannot bear to see delicate and refined feelings ascribed to

men in low conditions in society, because their vanity and self-love tell them that these belong only to themselves, and men like themselves in dress, station, and way of life; others are disgusted with the naked language of some of the most interesting passions of men, because either it is indelicate, or gross, or vulgar; as many fine ladies could not bear certain expressions in *The Mother* and *The Thorn*, and, as in the instance of Adam Smith, who, we are told, could not endure the ballad of *Clym of the Clough*, because the author had not written like a gentleman. Then there are professional and national prejudices for evermore. Some take no interest in the description of a particular passion or quality,as loveof solitariness, we will say, genial activity of fancy, love of nature, religion, and so forth, because they have [little or] nothing of it in themselves; and so on without end. I return then to [the] question, please whom? or what? I answer, human nature as it has been [and ever] will be. But, where are we to find the best measure of this? I answer, [from with]in; by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves to[wards men] who lead the simplest lives, and most according to nature; men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criticisms, effeminate habits of thinking and feeling, or who having known these things have outgrown them. This latter class is the most to be depended upon, but it is very small in number. People in our rank in life are perpetually falling into one sad mistake, namely, that of supposing that human nature and the persons they associate with are one and the same thing. Whom do we generally associate with? Gentlemen, persons of fortune, professional men, ladies, persons who can afford to buy, or can easily procure books of half-a-guinea price, hot-pressed, and printed upon superfine paper.

These persons are, it is true, a part of human nature, but we err lamentably if we suppose them to be fair representatives of the vast mass of human existence. And yet few ever consider books but with reference to their power of pleasing these persons and men of a higher rank; few descend lower, among cottages and fields, and among children. A man must have done this habitually before his judgment upon *The Idiot Boy* would be in any way decisive with me. I *know* I have done this myself habitually; I wrote the poem with exceeding delight and pleasure, and whenever I read it I read it with pleasure. You have given me praise for having reflected faithfully in my Poems the feelings of human nature. I would fain hope that I have done so. But a great Poet ought to do more than this; he ought, to a certain degree, to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides. I may illustrate this by a reference to natural objects. What false notions have prevailed from generation to generation of the true character of the Nightingale. As far as my Friend's Poem, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, is read, it will contribute greatly to rectify these. You will recollect a passage in Cowper, where, speaking of rural sounds, he says,

> And *even* the boding Owl
> That hails the rising moon has charms for me.

Cowper was passionately fond of natural objects, yet you see he mentions it as a marvellous thing that he could connect pleasure with the cry of the owl. In the same poem he speaks in the same manner of that

beautiful plant, the gorse; making in some degree an amiable boast of his loving it *unsightly* and unsmooth as it is. There are many aversions of this kind, which, though they have some foundation in nature, have yet so slight a one, that, though they may have prevailed hundreds of years, a philosopher will look upon them as accidents. So with respect to many moral feelings, either of love or dislike. What excessive admiration was paid in former times to personal prowess and military success; it is so with the latter even at the present day, but surely not nearly so much as heretofore. So with regard to birth, and innumerable other modes of sentiment, civil and religious. But you will be inclined to ask by this time how all this applies to *The Idiot Boy*. To this I can only say that the loathing and disgust which many people have at the sight of an idiot, is a feeling which, though having some foundation in human nature, is not necessarily attached to it in any virtuous degree, but is owing in a great measure to a false delicacy, and, if I may say it without rudeness, a certain want of comprehensiveness of thinking and feeling. Persons in the lower classes of society have little or nothing of this: if an idiot is born in a poor man's house, it must be taken care of, and cannot be boarded out, as it would be by gentlefolks, or sent to a public or private receptacle for such unfortunate beings. [Poor people] seeing frequently among their neighbours such objects, easily [forget] whatever there is of natural disgust about them, and have [therefore] a sane state, so that without pain or suffering they [perform] their duties towardsthem. I could with pl easure pursue this subject, but I must now strictly adopt the plan which I proposed to myself when I began to write this letter, namely, that of setting down a few hints or memorandums, which you will think of for my sake.

I have often applied to idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that *their life is hidden with God*. They are worshipped, probably from a feeling of this sort, in several parts of the East. Among the Alps, where they are numerous, they are considered, I believe, as a blessing to the family to which they belong. I have, indeed, often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards idiots as the great triumph of the human heart. It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love; nor have I ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and virtuous sentiments without finding it hallowed thereby, and having something in me which bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion.

There are, in my opinion, several important mistakes in the latter part of your letter which I could have wished to notice; but I find myself much fatigued. These refer both to the Boy and the Mother. I must content myself simply with observing that it is probable that the principal cause of your dislike to this particular poem lies in the *word* Idiot. If there had been any such word in our language, *to which we had attached passion*, as lack-wit, half-wit, witless, &c., I should have certainly employed it in preference; but there is no such word. Observe (this is entirely in reference to this particular poem), my *Idiot* is not one of those who cannot articulate, and such as are usually disgusting in their persons:

> *Whether in cunning or in joy,*
> *And then his words were not a few*, &c.

and the last speech at the end of the poem. The *Boy* whom I had in my mind was by no means disgusting in his appearance, quite the contrary; and

I have known several with imperfect faculties, who are handsome in their persons and features. There is one, at present, within a mile of my own house, remarkably so, though [he has something] of a stare and vacancy in his countenance. A friend of mine, knowing that some persons had a dislike to the poem, such as you have expressed, advised me to add a stanza, describing the person of the Boy [so as] entirely to separate him in the imaginations of my readers from that class of idiots who are disgusting in their persons; but the narration in the poem is so rapid and impassioned, that I could not find a place in which to insert the stanza without checking the progress of it, and [so leaving] a deadness upon the feeling. This poem has, I know, frequently produced the same effect as it did upon you and your friends; but there are many also to whom it affords exquisite delight, and who, indeed, prefer it to any other of my poems. This proves that the feelings there delineated are such as men *may* sympathize with. This is enough for my purpose. It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men *do* sympathize with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men *may* sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with.

I conclude with regret, because I have not said one half of [what I intended] to say; but I am sure you will deem my excuse sufficient, [when I] inform you that my head aches violently, and I am in other respects unwell. I must, however, again give you my warmest thanks for your kind letter. I shall be happy to hear from you again: and do not think it unreasonable that I should request a letter from you, when I feel that the answer which I may make to it

will not perhaps be above three or four lines. This I mention to you with frankness, and you will not take it ill after what I have before said of my remissness in writing letters.

I am, dear Sir, with great respect, yours sincerely,

W. Wordsworth.

PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS

(1800)

The first volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.

I had formed no very inaccurate estimate of the probable effect of those Poems: I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and, on the other hand, I was well aware, that by those who should dislike them, they would be read with more than common dislike. The result has differed from my expectation in this only, that a greater number have been pleased than I ventured to hope I should please.

. . . . . .

Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems, from a belief, that, if the views with which they were composed were indeed realized, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant

in the quality, and in the multiplicity of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of *reasoning* him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because, adequately to display the opinions, and fully to enforce the arguments, would require a space wholly disproportionate to a preface. For, to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence; yet I am sensible, that there would be something like impropriety in abruptly obtruding upon the Public, without a few words of introduction, Poems so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed.

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. This exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must in different eras of literature have excited very different

expectations: for example, in the age of Catullus, Terence, and Lucretius, and that of Statius or Claudian; and in our own country, in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher, and that of Donne and Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope. I will not take upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which, by the act of writing in verse, an Author in the present day makes to his reader: but it will undoubtedly appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily contracted. They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. I hope therefore the reader will not censure me for attempting to state what I have proposed to myself to perform; and also (as far as the limits of a preface will permit) to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose: that at least he may be spared any unpleasant feeling of disappointment, and that I myself may be protected from one of the most dishonourable accusations which can be brought against an Author; namely, that of an indolence which prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty, or, when his duty is ascertained, prevents him from performing it.

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby

ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they

separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation [1].

I cannot, however, be insensible to the present outcry against the triviality and meanness, both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonourable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time, that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy *purpose*. Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general repre-

[1] It is worth while here to observe, that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.

sentatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.

It has been said that each of these poems has a purpose. Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.

A sense of false modesty shall not prevent me from asserting, that the Reader's attention is pointed to this mark of distinction, far less for the sake of these particular Poems than from the general importance of the subject. The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the dis-

criminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.—When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; and were there not added to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.

Having dwelt thus long on the subjects and aim of these Poems, I shall request the Reader's permission to apprise him of a few circumstances relating to their *style*, in order, among other reasons, that he may not censure me for not having performed what I never attempted. The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes;

and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him. Others who pursue a different track will interest him likewise; I do not interfere with their claim, but wish to prefer a claim of my own. There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; as much pains has been taken to avoid it as is ordinarily taken to produce it; this has been done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to the language of men; and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to myself to impart, is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be the proper object of poetry. Without being culpably particular, I do not know how to give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which it was my wish and intention to write, than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject; consequently, there is I hope in these Poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense: but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which

from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, having abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower.

If in a poem there should be found a series of lines, or even a single line, in which the language, though naturally arranged, and according to the strict laws of metre, does not differ from that of prose, there is a numerous class of critics, who, when they stumble upon these prosaisms, as they call them, imagine that they have made a notable discovery, and exult over the Poet as over a man ignorant of his own profession. Now these men would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. And it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings, even of Milton himself. To illustrate the subject in a general manner, I will here adduce a short composition of Gray, who was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire:
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire.
These ears, alas! for other notes repine;
A different object do these eyes require;
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
To warm their little loves the birds complain.
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

It will easily be perceived, that the only part of this Sonnet which is of any value is the lines printed in Italics; it is equally obvious, that, except in the rhyme, and in the use of the single word 'fruitless' for fruitlessly, which is so far a defect, the language of these lines does in no respect differ from that of prose.

By the foregoing quotation it has been shown that the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and it was previously asserted, that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. We will go further. It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are

clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry[1] sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep', but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.

If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what has just been said on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such Poetry as is here recommended is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have? Whence is it to come? And where is it to exist? Not, surely, where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters: it cannot be necessary here, either

[1] I here use the word 'Poetry' (though against my own judgement) as opposed to the word Prose, and synonymous with metrical composition. But much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre; nor is this, in truth, a *strict* antithesis, because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable.

for elevation of style, or any of its supposed ornaments: for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. And, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.

But, as the pleasure which I hope to give by the Poems now presented to the Reader must depend entirely on just notions upon this subject, and, as it is in itself of high importance to our taste and moral feelings, I cannot content myself with these detached remarks. And if, in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, such persons may be reminded, that, whatever be the language outwardly holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown. If my conclusions are admitted, and carried as far as they must be carried if admitted at all, our judgements concerning the works of the greatest Poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both when we praise, and when we censure: and our moral feelings influencing and influenced by these judgements will, I believe, be corrected and purified.

Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, let me ask, what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him?—He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves:—whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.

But whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt that the language which it will suggest to him, must often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real

life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself.

However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle of selection which has been already insisted upon. He will depend upon this for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which *his* fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.

But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks, that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself as in the situation of a translator, who does not scruple to substitute excellencies of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally

to surpass his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit. But this would be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair. Further, it is the language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a *taste* for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry. Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art. The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.

Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgement

of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks to the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.

To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which, without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight, the Poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. And thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature, with affections akin to those, which, through labour and length of time, the Man of science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and

customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.—It is not, then, to be supposed that any one, who holds that sublime notion of Poetry which I have attempted to convey,

will break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments, and endeavour to excite admiration of himself by arts, the necessity of which must manifestly depend upon the assumed meanness of his subject.

What has been thus far said applies to Poetry in general; but especially to those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters; and upon this point it appears to authorize the conclusion that there are few persons of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general; to a body of men who, from the circumstance of their compositions being in metre, it is expected will employ a particular language.

It is not, then, in the dramatic parts of composition that we look for this distinction of language; but still it may be proper and necessary where the Poet speaks to us in his own person and character. To this I answer by referring the Reader to the description before given of a Poet. Among the qualities there enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. And with what are they connected? Un-

doubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? It might be *proved* that it is impossible. But supposing that this were not the case, the Poet might then be allowed to use a peculiar language when expressing his feelings for his own gratification or that of men like himself. But Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which subsists upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves. To this it may be added, that while he is only selecting from the real language of men, or, which amounts to the same thing, composing accurately in the spirit of such selection, he is treading upon safe ground, and we know what we are to expect from him. Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for, as it may be proper to remind the Reader, the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not, like that which is produced by what is usually called POETIC DICTION, arbitrary, and subject to

infinite caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made. In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion; whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion, but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shown to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it.

It will now be proper to answer an obvious question, namely, Why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse? To this, in addition to such answer as is included in what has been already said, I reply, in the first place, Because, however I may have restricted myself, there is still left open to me what confessedly constitutes the most valuable object of all writing, whether in prose or verse; the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature before me—to supply endless combinations of forms and imagery. Now, supposing for a moment that whatever is interesting in these objects may be as vividly described in prose, why should I be condemned for attempting to superadd to such description the charm which, by the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language? To this, by such as are yet unconvinced, it may be answered that a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the metre, and that it is injudicious to write in metre, unless it be accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style with which metre is usually accompanied, and that, by such deviation, more will be lost from the shock which will thereby be given to the Reader's associations than will be

counterbalanced by any pleasure which he can derive from the general power of numbers. In answer to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end, and who also, in my opinion, greatly underrate the power of metre in itself, it might, perhaps, as far as relates to these Volumes, have been almost sufficient to observe, that poems are extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a still more naked and simple style, which have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked and simple are capable of affording pleasure at the present day; and, what I wished *chiefly* to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the impression of this belief.

But various causes might be pointed out why, when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who proves the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure; but, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order. If the words, however, by which this excitement is produced be in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind

has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true; and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose. The metre of the old ballads is very artless; yet they contain many passages which would illustrate this opinion; and, I hope, if the following Poems be attentively perused, similar instances will be found in them. This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe*, or *The Gamester*; while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure —an effect which, in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement. On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then (unless the Poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious), in the feelings of

pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether cheerful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the Poet proposes to himself.

If I had undertaken a SYSTEMATIC defence of the theory here maintained, it would have been my duty to develop the various causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical language depends. Among the chief of these causes is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of accurate reflection; namely, the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. It would not be a useless employment to apply this principle to the consideration of metre, and to show that metre is hence enabled to afford much pleasure, and to point out in what manner that pleasure is produced. But my limits will not permit me to enter upon this subject, and I must content myself with a general summary.

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tran-

quillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. If Nature be thus cautious to preserve in a state of enjoyment a being so employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that, whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely—all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. This effect is always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry; while, in lighter compositions, the ease and gracefulness with which the Poet manages his numbers are themselves confessedly a principal source of the gratification of the Reader. All that it is *necessary* to say, however, upon this subject,

may be effected by affirming, what few persons will deny, that, of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once.

Having thus explained a few of my reasons for writing in verse, and why I have chosen subjects from common life, and endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men, if I have been too minute in pleading my own cause, I have at the same time been treating a subject of general interest; and for this reason a few words shall be added with reference solely to these particular poems, and to some defects which will probably be found in them. I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, I may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. Hence I have no doubt, that, in some instances, feelings, even of the ludicrous, may be given to my Readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. Such faulty expressions, were I convinced they were faulty at present, and that they must necessarily continue to be so, I would willingly take all reasonable pains to correct. But it is dangerous to make these alterations on the simple authority of a few individuals, or even of certain classes of men; for where the understanding of an Author is not convinced, or his feelings altered, this cannot be done without great injury to himself: for his own

feelings are his stay and support; and, if he set them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind shall lose all confidence in itself, and become utterly debilitated. To this it may be added, that the critic ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and, perhaps, in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying of most readers, that it is not probable they will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and, above all, since they are so much less interested in the subject, they may decide lightly and carelessly.

Long as the Reader has been detained, I hope he will permit me to caution him against a mode of false criticism which has been applied to Poetry, in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature. Such verses have been triumphed over in parodies, of which Dr. Johnson's stanza is a fair specimen:—

> I put my hat upon my head
> And walked into the Strand,
> And there I met another man
> Whose hat was in his hand.

Immediately under these lines let us place one of the most justly admired stanzas of the 'Babes in the Wood'.

> These pretty Babes with hand in hand
> Went wandering up and down;
> But never more they saw the Man
> Approaching from the Town.

In both these stanzas the words, and the order of

the words, in no respect differ from the most unimpassioned conversation. There are words in both, for example, 'the Strand', and 'the Town', connected with none but the most familiar ideas; yet the one stanza we admit as admirable, and the other as a fair example of the superlatively contemptible. Whence arises this difference? Not from the metre, not from the language, not from the order of the words; but the *matter* expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible. The proper method of treating trivial and simple verses, to which Dr. Johnson's stanza would be a fair parallelism, is not to say, this is a bad kind of poetry, or, this is not poetry; but, this wants sense; it is neither interesting in itself, nor can *lead* to anything interesting; the images neither originate in that sane state of feeling which arises out of thought, nor can excite thought or feeling in the Reader. This is the only sensible manner of dealing with such verses. Why trouble yourself about the species till you have previously decided upon the genus? Why take pains to prove that an ape is not a Newton, when it is self-evident that he is not a man?

One request I must make of my reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others. How common is it to hear a person say, I myself do not object to this style of composition, or this or that expression, but, to such and such classes of people it will appear mean or ludicrous! This mode of criticism, so destructive of all sound unadulterated judgement, is almost universal: let the Reader then abide, independently, by his own feelings, and, if he finds himself affected, let him not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure.

If an Author, by any single composition, has impressed us with respect for his talents, it is useful to consider this as affording a presumption, that on other occasions where we have been displeased, he, nevertheless, may not have written ill or absurdly; and further, to give him so much credit for this one composition as may induce us to review what has displeased us, with more care than we should otherwise have bestowed upon it. This is not only an act of justice, but, in our decisions upon poetry especially, may conduce, in a high degree, to the improvement of our own taste; for an *accurate* taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself (I have already said that I wish him to judge for himself), but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous; and that, in many cases, it necessarily will be so.

Nothing would, I know, have so effectually contributed to further the end which I have in view, as to have shown of what kind the pleasure is, and how that pleasure is produced, which is confessedly produced by metrical composition essentially different from that which I have here endeavoured to recommend: for the Reader will say that he has been pleased by such composition; and what more can be done for him? The power of any art is limited; and he will suspect, that, if it be proposed to furnish him with new friends, that can be only upon condition of his abandoning his old friends. Besides, as I have

said, the Reader is himself conscious of the pleasure which he has received from such composition, composition to which he has peculiarly attached the endearing name of Poetry; and all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honourable bigotry, for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased. There is in these feelings enough to resist a host of arguments; and I should be less able to combat them successfully, as I am willing to allow, that, in order entirely to enjoy the Poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed. But, would my limits have permitted me to point out how this pleasure is produced, many obstacles might have been removed, and the Reader assisted in perceiving that the powers of language are not so limited as he may suppose; and that it is possible for poetry to give other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature. This part of the subject has not been altogether neglected, but it has not been so much my present aim to prove, that the interest excited by some other kinds of poetry is less vivid, and less worthy of the nobler powers of the mind, as to offer reasons for presuming, that if my purpose were fulfilled, a species of poetry would be produced, which is genuine poetry; in its nature well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations.

From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I had in view: he will determine how far it has been attained; and, what is a much

more important question, whether it be worth attaining: and upon the decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the Public.

APPENDIX TO LYRICAL BALLADS (1802)

Perhaps, as I have no right to expect that attentive perusal, without which, confined, as I have been, to the narrow limits of a preface, my meaning cannot be thoroughly understood, I am anxious to give an exact notion of the sense in which the phrase poetic diction has been used; and for this purpose, a few words shall here be added, concerning the origin and characteristics of the phraseology, which I have condemned under that name.

The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connexion whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in *any situation.* The Reader or Hearer of this distorted language found himself in a perturbed and unusual state of mind: when affected by the genuine language of passion he had been in a perturbed and unusual state of

mind also: in both cases he was willing that his common judgement and understanding should be laid asleep, and he had no instinctive and infallible perception of the true to make him reject the false; the one served as a passport for the other. The emotion was in both cases delightful, and no wonder if he confounded the one with the other, and believed them both to be produced by the same, or similar causes. Besides, the Poet spake to him in the character of a man to be looked up to, a man of genius and authority. Thus, and from a variety of other causes, this distorted language was received with admiration; and Poets, it is probable, who had before contented themselves for the most part with misapplying only expressions which at first had been dictated by real passion, carried the abuse still further, and introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and characterized by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature.

It is indeed true, that the language of the earliest Poets was felt to differ materially from ordinary language, because it was the language of extraordinary occasions; but it was really spoken by men, language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described, or which he had heard uttered by those around him. To this language it is probable that metre of some sort or other was early superadded. This separated the genuine language of Poetry still further from common life, so that whoever read or heard the poems of these earliest Poets felt himself moved in a way in which he had not been accustomed to be moved in real life, and by causes manifestly different from those which acted upon him in real life. This

was the great temptation to all the corruptions which have followed: under the protection of this feeling succeeding Poets constructed a phraseology which had one thing, it is true, in common with the genuine language of poetry, namely, that it was not heard in ordinary conversation; that it was unusual. But the first Poets, as I have said, spake a language which, though unusual, was still the language of men. This circumstance, however, was disregarded by their successors; they found that they could please by easier means: they became proud of modes of expression which they themselves had invented, and which were uttered only by themselves. In process of time metre became a symbol or promise of this unusual language, and whoever took upon him to write in metre, according as he possessed more or less of true poetic genius, introduced less or more of this adulterated phraseology into his compositions, and the true and the false were inseparably interwoven until, the taste of men becoming gradually perverted, this language was received as a natural language: and at length, by the influence of books upon men, did to a certain degree really become so. Abuses of this kind were imported from one nation to another, and with the progress of refinement this diction became daily more and more corrupt, thrusting out of sight the plain humanities of nature by a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas.

It would not be uninteresting to point out the causes of the pleasure given by this extravagant and absurd diction. It depends upon a great variety of causes, but upon none, perhaps, more than its influence in impressing a notion of the peculiarity and exaltation of the Poet's character, and in flattering the Reader's self-love by bringing him nearer to a

sympathy with that character; an effect which is accomplished by unsettling ordinary habits of thinking, and thus assisting the Reader to approach to that perturbed and dizzy state of mind in which if he does not find himself, he imagines that he is *balked* of a peculiar enjoyment which poetry can and ought to bestow.

The sonnet quoted from Gray, in the Preface, except the lines printed in Italics, consists of little else but this diction, though not of the worst kind; and indeed, if one may be permitted to say so, it is far too common in the best writers both ancient and modern. Perhaps in no way, by positive example, could more easily be given a notion of what I mean by the phrase *poetic diction* than by referring to a comparison between the metrical paraphrase which we have of passages in the Old and New Testament, and those passages as they exist in our common Translation. See Pope's *Messiah* throughout; Prior's 'Did sweeter sounds adorn my flowing tongue', &c. &c. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels', &c. &c., 1st Corinthians, ch. xiii. By way of immediate example take the following of Dr. Johnson:—

Turn on the prudent Ant thy heedless eyes,
Observe her labours, Sluggard, and be wise;
No stern command, no monitory voice,
Prescribes her duties, or directs her choice;
Yet, timely provident, she hastes away
To snatch the blessings of a plenteous day;
When fruitful Summer loads the teeming plain,
She crops the harvest, and she stores the grain.
How long shall sloth usurp thy useless hours,
Unnerve thy vigour, and enchain thy powers?
While artful shades thy downy couch enclose,
And soft solicitation courts repose,

Amidst the drowsy charms of dull delight,
Year chases year with unremitted flight,
Till Want now following, fraudulent and slow,
Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambush'd foe.

From this hubbub of words pass to the original. 'Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O Sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.' Proverbs, ch. vi.

One more quotation, and I have done. It is from Cowper's Verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk:—

Religion! what treasure untold
Resides in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
Or all that this earth can afford.
But the sound of the church-going bell
These valleys and rocks never heard,
Ne'er sighed at the sound of a knell,
Or smiled when a sabbath appeared.

Ye winds, that have made me your sport
Convey to this desolate shore
Some cordial endearing report
Of a land I must visit no more.
My Friends, do they now and then send
A wish or a thought after me?
O tell me I yet have a friend,
Though a friend I am never to see.

This passage is quoted as an instance of three different styles of composition. The first four lines

are poorly expressed; some Critics would call the language prosaic; the fact is, it would be bad prose, so bad, that it is scarcely worse in metre. The epithet 'church-going' applied to a bell, and that by so chaste a writer as Cowper, is an instance of the strange abuses which Poets have introduced into their language, till they and their Readers take them as matters of course, if they do not single them out expressly as objects of admiration. The two lines 'Ne'er sighed at the sound', &c., are, in my opinion, an instance of the language of passion wrested from its proper use, and, from the mere circumstance of the composition being in metre, applied upon an occasion that does not justify such violent expressions; and I should condemn the passage, though perhaps few Readers will agree with me, as vicious poetic direction. The last stanza is throughout admirably expressed: it would be equally good whether in prose or verse, except that the Reader has an exquisite pleasure in seeing such natural language so naturally connected with metre. The beauty of this stanza tempts me to conclude with a principle which ought never to be lost sight of, and which has been my chief guide in all I have said,—namely, that in works of *imagination and sentiment*, for of these only have I been treating, in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or in verse, they require and exact one and the same language. Metre is but adventitious to composition, and the phraseology for which that passport is necessary, even where it may be graceful at all, will be little valued by the judicious.

LETTER TO LADY BEAUMONT

(1807)

Coleorton, May 21, 1807.

My dear Lady Beaumont,

Though I am to see you so soon, I cannot but write a word or two, to thank you for the interest you take in my poems, as evinced by your solicitude about their immediate reception. I write partly to thank you for this, and to express the pleasure it has given me, and partly to remove any uneasiness from your mind which the disappointments you sometimes meet with, in this labour of love, may occasion. I see that you have many battles to fight for me,—more than, in the ardour and confidence of your pure and elevated mind, you had ever thought of being summoned to; but be assured that this opposition is nothing more than what I distinctly foresaw that you and my other friends would have to encounter. I say this, not to give myself credit for an eye of prophecy, but to allay any vexatious thoughts on my account which this opposition may have produced in you.

It is impossible that any expectations can be lower than mine concerning the immediate effect of this little work upon what is called the public. I do not here take into consideration the envy and malevolence, and all the bad passions which always stand in the way of a work of any merit from a living poet; but merely think of the pure, absolute, honest ignorance in which all worldlings of every rank and situation must be enveloped, with respect to the thoughts, feelings, and images, on which the life of my poems depends. The things which I have taken, whether from within or without, what have they to do with routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to

door, from street to street, on foot or in carriage; with Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox, Mr. Paul or Sir Francis Burdett, the Westminster election or the borough of Honiton? In a word—for I cannot stop to make my way through the hurry of images that present themselves to me—what have they to do with endless talking about things nobody cares anything for except as far as their own vanity is concerned, and this with persons they care nothing for but as their vanity or *selfishness* is concerned?—what have they to do (to say all at once) with a life without love? In such a life there can be no thought; for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain) but as far as we have love and admiration.

It is an awful truth, that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world—among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.

Upon this I shall insist elsewhere; at present let me confine myself to my object, which is to make you, my dear friend, as easy-hearted as myself with respect to these poems. Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny?—to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform, long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves. I am well aware how far

it would seem to many I overrate my own exertions, when I speak in this way, in direct connexion with the volume I have just made public.

I am not, however, afraid of such censure, insignificant as probably the majority of those poems would appear to very respectable persons. I do not mean London wits and witlings, for these have too many foul passions about them to be respectable, even if they had more intellect than the benign laws of Providence will allow to such a heartless existence as theirs is; but grave, kindly-natured, worthy persons, who would be pleased if they could. I hope that these volumes are not without some recommendations, even for readers of this class: but their imagination has slept; and the voice which is the voice of my poetry, without imagination, cannot be heard. Leaving these, I was going to say a word to such readers as Mr. ——. Such!—how would he be offended if he knew I considered him only as a representative of a class, and not an unique! 'Pity', says Mr. —— 'that so many trifling things should be admitted to obstruct the view of those that have merit.' Now, let this candid judge take, by way of example, the sonnets, which, probably, with the exception of two or three other poems, for which I will not contend, appear to him the most trifling, as they are the shortest. I would say to him, omitting things of higher consideration, there is one thing which must strike you at once, if you will only read these poems,—that those 'to Liberty', at least, have a connexion with, or a bearing upon, each other; and, therefore, if individually they want weight, perhaps, as a body, they may not be so deficient. At least, this ought to induce you to suspend your judgement, and qualify it so far as to allow that the writer aims at least at comprehensiveness.

But, dropping this, I would boldly say at once, that these sonnets, while they each fix the attention upon some important sentiment, separately considered, do, at the same time, collectively make a poem on the subject of civil liberty and national independence, which, either for simplicity of style or grandeur of moral sentiment, is, alas! likely to have few parallels in the poetry of the present day. Again, turn to the 'Moods of my own Mind'. There is scarcely a poem here of above thirty lines, and very trifling these poems will appear to many; but, omitting to speak of them individually, do they not, taken collectively, fix the attention upon a subject eminently poetical, viz., the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections, more or less permanent, more or less capable of salutary renewal in the mind of the being contemplating these objects? This is poetic, and essentially poetic. And why? Because it is creative.

But I am wasting words, for it is nothing more than you know; and if said to those for whom it is intended, it would not be understood.

I see by your last letter, that Mrs. Fermor has entered into the spirit of these 'Moods of my own Mind'. Your transcript from her letter gave me the greatest pleasure; but I must say that even she has something yet to receive from me. I say this with confidence, from her thinking that I have fallen below myself in the sonnet, beginning,

With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh.

As to the other which she objects to, I will only observe, that there is a misprint in the last line but two,

And *though* this wilderness,

for

And *through* this wilderness,

that makes it unintelligible. This latter sonnet, for many reasons (though I do not abandon it), I will not now speak of; but upon the other, I could say something important in conversation, and will attempt now to illustrate it by a comment, which, I feel, will be inadequate to convey my meaning. There is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution. For instance, in the present case, who is there that has not felt that the mind can have no rest among a multitude of objects, of which it either cannot make one whole, or from which it cannot single out one individual whereupon may be concentrated the attention, divided among or distracted by a multitude? After a certain time, we must either select one image or object, which must put out of view the rest wholly, or must subordinate them to itself while it stands forth as a head:

> How glowed the firmament
> With living sapphires! Hesperus, that *led*
> The starry host, rode brightest; till the moon,
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length,
> Apparent *Queen*, unveiled *her peerless* light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

Having laid this down as a general principle, take the case before us. I am represented in the sonnet as casting my eyes over the sea, sprinkled with a multitude of ships, like the heavens with stars. My mind may be supposed to float up and down among them, in a kind of dreamy indifference with respect either to this or that one, only in a pleasurable state of feeling with respect to the whole prospect. 'Joyously it showed.' This continued till that feeling may be supposed to have passed away, and a kind of com-

parative listlessness or apathy to have succeeded, as at this line,

Some veering up and down, one knew not why.

All at once, while I am in this state, comes forth an object, an individual; and my mind, sleepy and unfixed, is awakened and fastened in a moment.

Hesperus, that *led*
The starry host

is a poetical object, because the glory of his own nature gives him the pre-eminence the moment he appears. He calls forth the poetic faculty, receiving its exertions as a tribute. But this ship in the sonnet may, in a manner still more appropriate, be said to come upon a mission of the poetic spirit, because, in its own appearance and attributes, it is barely sufficiently distinguished to rouse the creative faculty of the human mind, to exertions at all times welcome, but doubly so when they come upon us when in a state of remissness. The mind being once fixed and roused, all the rest comes from itself; it is merely a lordly ship, nothing more:

This ship was nought to me, nor I to her,
Yet I pursued her with a lover's look.

My mind wantons with grateful joy in the exercise of its own powers, and, loving its own creation,

This ship to all the rest I did prefer,

making her a sovereign or a regent, and thus giving body and life to all the rest; mingling up this idea with fondness and praise—

where she comes the winds must stir;

and concluding the whole with,

On went she, and due north her journey took;

thus taking up again the reader with whom I began, letting him know how long I must have watched this favourite vessel, and inviting him to rest his mind as mine is resting.

Having said so much upon mere fourteen lines, which Mrs. Fermor did not approve, I cannot but add a word or two upon my satisfaction in finding that my mind has so much in common with hers, and that we participate so many of each other's pleasures. I collect this from her having singled out the two little poems, 'The Daffodils', and 'The Rock crowned with Snowdrops'. I am sure that whoever is much pleased with either of these quiet and tender delineations must be fitted to walk through the recesses of my poetry with delight, and will there recognize, at every turn, something or other in which, and over which, it has that property and right which knowledge and love confer. The line,

Come, blessed barrier, &c.,

in the 'Sonnet upon Sleep', which Mrs. F. points out, had before been mentioned to me by Coleridge, and, indeed, by almost everybody who had heard it, as eminently beautiful. My letter (as this second sheet, which I am obliged to take, admonishes me) is growing to an enormous length; and yet, saving that I have expressed my calm confidence that these poems will live, I have said nothing which has a particular application to the object of it, which was to remove all disquiet from your mind on account of the condemnation they may at present incur from that portion of my contemporaries who are called the public. I am sure, my dear Lady Beaumont, if you attach any importance to it, it can only be from an apprehension that it may affect me, upon which I have already set you at ease; or from a fear that this present blame

is ominous of their future or final destiny. If this be the case, your tenderness for me betrays you. Be assured that the decision of these persons has nothing to do with the question; they are altogether incompetent judges. These people, in the senseless hurry of their idle lives, do not *read* books, they merely snatch a glance at them, that they may talk about them. And even if this were not so, never forget what, I believe, was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen; this, in a certain degree, even to all persons, however wise and pure may be their lives, and however unvitiated their taste. But for those who dip into books in order to give an opinion of them, or talk about them to take up an opinion—for this multitude of unhappy, and misguided, and misguiding beings, an entire regeneration must be produced; and if this be possible, it must be a work *of time*. To conclude, my ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz, and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings; and, after what I have said, I am sure yours will be the same. I doubt not that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings (and among them these little poems) will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, wherever found; and that they will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier. Farewell! I will not apologize for this letter, though its length demands an apology. Believe me, eagerly wishing for the happy day when I shall see you and Sir George here,

Most affectionately yours,

W. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO 'THE FRIEND'[1]

(1809)

THE Friend might rest satisfied that his exertions thus far have not been wholly unprofitable, if no other proof had been given of their influence, than that of having called forth the foregoing letter, with which he has been so much interested, that he could not deny himself the pleasure of communicating it to his readers.—In answer to his correspondent, it need scarcely here be repeated, that one of the main purposes of his work is to weigh, honestly and thoughtfully, the moral worth and intellectual power of the age in which we live; to ascertain our gain and our loss; to determine what we are in ourselves positively, and what we are compared with our ancestors; and thus, and by every other means within his power, to discover what may be hoped for future times, what and how lamentable are the evils to be feared, and how far there is cause for fear. If this attempt should not be made wholly in vain, my ingenuous correspondent, and all who are in a state of mind resembling that of which he gives so lively a picture, will be enabled more readily and surely to distinguish false from legitimate objects of admiration: and thus may the personal errors which he would guard against be more effectually prevented or removed by the developement of general truth for a general purpose, than by instructions specifically adapted to himself or to the class of which he is the able representative. There is a life and spirit in knowledge which we extract from truths scattered for the benefit of all, and which the mind, by its own activity, has appropriated to itself—a life and a spirit, which is seldom found in knowledge communicated by formal and direct pre-

[1] From *The Friend* for Dec. 14, 1809 (to p. 61, l. 4), and Jan. 4, 1810 (l. 5 to the end).

cepts, even when they are exalted and endeared by reverence and love for the teacher.

Nevertheless, though I trust that the assistance which my correspondent has done me the honour to request, will in course of time flow naturally from my labours, in a manner that will best serve him, I cannot resist the inclination to connect, at present, with his letter a few remarks of direct application to the subject of it—*remarks*, I say, for to such I shall confine myself, independent of the main point out of which his complaint and request both proceed, I mean the assumed inferiority of the present age in moral dignity and intellectual power, to those which have preceded it. For if the fact were true, that we had even surpassed our ancestors in the best of what is good, the main part of the dangers and impediments which my correspondent has feelingly pourtrayed, could not cease to exist for minds like his, nor indeed would they be much diminished; as they arise out of the constitution of things, from the nature of youth, from the laws that govern the growth of the faculties, and from the necessary condition of the great body of mankind. Let us throw ourselves back to the age of Elizabeth, and call up to mind the heroes, the warriors, the statesmen, the poets, the divines, and the moral philosophers, with which the reign of the Virgin Queen was illustrated. Or if we be more strongly attracted by the moral purity and greatness, and that sanctity of civil and religious duty, with which the tyranny of Charles the first was struggled against, let us cast our eyes, in the hurry of admiration, round that circle of glorious patriots—but do not let us be persuaded, that each of these, in his course of discipline, was uniformly helped forward by those with whom he associated, or by those

whose care it was to direct him. Then as now existed objects, to which the wisest attached undue importance; then as now judgement was misled by factions and parties—time wasted in controversies fruitless, except as far as they quickened the faculties; then as now minds were venerated or idolized, which owed their influence to the weakness of their contemporaries rather than to their own power. Then, though great actions were wrought, and great works in literature and science produced, yet the general taste was capricious, fantastical, or grovelling; and in this point, as in all others, was youth subject to delusion, frequent in proportion to the liveliness of the sensibility, and strong as the strength of the imagination. Every age hath abounded in instances of parents, kindred, and friends, who, by indirect influence of example, or by positive injunction and exhortation, have diverted or discouraged the youth, who, in the simplicity and purity of nature, had determined to follow his intellectual genius through good and through evil, and had devoted himself to knowledge, to the practice of virtue and the preservation of integrity, in slight of temporal rewards. Above all, have not the common duties and cares of common life, at all times exposed men to injury, from causes whose action is the more fatal from being silent and unremitting, and which, wherever it was not jealously watched and steadily opposed, must have pressed upon and consumed the diviner spirit?

There are two errors, into which we easily slip when thinking of past times. One lies in forgetting, in the excellence of what remains, the large overbalance of worthlessness that has been swept away. Ranging over the wide tracts of antiquity, the situation of the mind may be likened to that of

a traveller[1] in some unpeopled part of America, who is attracted to the burial place of one of the primitive inhabitants. It is conspicuous upon an eminence, 'a mount upon a mount!' He digs into it, and finds that it contains the bones of a man of mighty stature: and he is tempted to give way to a belief, that as there were giants in those days, so that all men were giants. But a second and wiser thought may suggest to him, that this tomb would never have forced itself upon his notice, if it had not contained a body that was distinguished from others,—that of a man who had been selected as a chieftain or ruler for the very reason that he surpassed the rest of his tribe in stature, and who now lies thus conspicuously inhumed upon the mountain-top, while the bones of his followers are laid unobtrusively together in their burrows upon the plain below. The second habitual error is, that in this comparison of ages we divide time merely into past and present, and place these in the balance to be weighed against each other, not considering that the present is in our estimation not more than a period of thirty years, or half a century at most, and that the past is a mighty accumulation of many such periods, perhaps the whole of recorded time, or at least the whole of that portion of it in which our own country has been distinguished. We may illustrate this by the familiar use of the words ancient and modern, when applied to poetry. What can be more inconsiderate or unjust than to compare a few existing writers with the whole succession of their progenitors? The delusion, from the moment that our thoughts are directed to it, seems too gross to deserve mention; yet men will talk for hours upon poetry, balancing against each other

[1] Vide Ashe's *Travels in America*.

the words ancient and modern, and be unconscious that they have fallen into it.

These observations are not made as implying a dissent from the belief of my correspondent, that the moral spirit and intellectual powers of this country are declining; but to guard against *unqualified* admiration, even in cases where admiration has been rightly fixed, and to prevent that depression, which must necessarily follow, where the notion of the peculiar unfavourableness of the present times to dignity of mind has been carried too far. For in proportion as we imagine obstacles to exist out of ourselves to retard our progress, will, in fact, our progress be retarded.—Deeming then, that in all ages an ardent mind will be baffled and led astray in the manner under contemplation, though in various degrees, I shall at present content myself with a few practical and desultory comments upon some of those general causes, to which my correspondent justly attributes the errors in opinion, and the lowering or deadening of sentiment, to which ingenuous and aspiring youth is exposed. And first, for the heart-cheering belief in the perpetual progress of the species towards a point of unattainable perfection. If the present age do indeed transcend the past in what is most beneficial and honourable, he that perceives this, being in no error, has no cause for complaint; but if it be not so, a youth of genius might, it should seem, be preserved from any wrong influence of this faith, by an insight into a simple truth, namely, that it is not necessary, in order to satisfy the desires of our nature, or to reconcile us to the economy of providence, that there should be at all times a continuous advance in what is of highest worth. In fact it is not, as a writer of the present day

has admirably observed, in the power of fiction to pourtray in words, or of the imagination to conceive in spirit, actions or characters of more exalted virtue, than those which thousands of years ago have existed upon earth, as we know from the records of authentic history. Such is the inherent dignity of human nature, that there belong to it sublimities of virtue which all men may attain, and which no man can transcend: and, though this be not true in an equal degree of intellectual power, yet in the persons of Plato, Demosthenes, and Homer,—and in those of Shakespeare, Milton, and Lord Bacon,—were enshrined as much of the divinity of intellect as the inhabitants of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them. But the question is not of the power or worth of individual minds, but of the general moral or intellectual merits of an age—or a people, or of the human race. Be it so—let us allow and believe that there is a progress in the species towards unattainable perfection, or whether this be so or not, that it is a necessity of a good and greatly-gifted nature to believe it—surely it does not follow, that this progress should be constant in those virtues and intellectual qualities, and in those departments of knowledge, which in themselves absolutely considered are of most value—things independent and in their degree indispensible. The progress of the species neither is nor can be like that of a Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a river, which, both in its smaller reaches and larger turnings, is frequently forced back towards its fountains, by objects which cannot otherwise be eluded or overcome; yet with an accompanying impulse that will ensure its advancement hereafter, it is either gaining strength every hour, or conquering in secret some

difficulty, by a labour that contributes as effectually to further it in its course, as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line, direct as that of the Roman road with which we began the comparison.

It suffices to content the mind, though there may be an apparent stagnation, or a retrograde movement in the species, that something is doing which is necessary to be done, and the effects of which will in due time appear;—that something is unremittingly gaining, either in secret preparation or in open and triumphant progress. But in fact here, as every where, we are deceived by creations which the mind is compelled to make for itself; we speak of the species not as an aggregate, but as endued with the form and separate life of an individual. But human kind,—what is it else than myriads of rational beings in various degrees obedient to their reason; some torpid, some aspiring; some in eager chase to the right hand, some to the left; these wasting down their moral nature, and these feeding it for immortality? A whole generation may appear even to sleep, or may be exasperated with rage—they that compose it, tearing each other to pieces with more than brutal fury. It is enough for complacency and hope, that scattered and solitary minds are always labouring somewhere in the service of truth and virtue; and that by the sleep of the multitude the energy of the multitude may be prepared; and that by the fury of the people the chains of the people may be broken. Happy moment was it for England when her Chaucer, who has rightly been called the morning star of her literature, appeared above the horizon—when her Wickliff, like the sun, 'shot orient beams' through the night of Romish superstition!—Yet may the darkness and the desolating hurricane which immediately followed in the

wars of York and Lancaster, be deemed in their turn a blessing, with which the Land has been visited.

May I return to the thought of progress, of accumulation, of increasing light, or of any other image by which it may please us to represent the improvement of the species? The hundred years that followed the usurpation of Henry the fourth, were a hurling-back of the mind of the country, a delapidation, an extinction; yet institutions, laws, customs, and habits, were then broken down, which would not have been so readily, nor perhaps so thoroughly destroyed by the gradual influence of increasing knowledge; and under the oppression of which, if they had continued to exist, the virtue and intellectual prowess of the succeeding century could not have appeared at all, much less could they have displayed themselves with that eager haste, and with those beneficent triumphs which will to the end of time be looked back upon with admiration and gratitude.

If the foregoing obvious distinctions be once clearly perceived, and steadily kept in view,—I do not see why a belief in the progress of human nature towards perfection, should dispose a youthful mind, however enthusiastic, to an undue admiration of his own age, and thus tend to degrade that mind.

But let me strike at once at the root of the evil complained of in my correspondent's letter.—— Protection from any fatal effect of seductions, and hindrances which opinion may throw in the way of pure and high-minded youth, can only be obtained with certainty at the same price by which every thing great and good is obtained, namely, steady dependence upon voluntary and self-originating effort, and upon the practice of self-examination,

sincerely aimed at and rigorously enforced. But how is this to be expected from youth? Is it not to demand the fruit when the blossom is barely put forth, and is hourly at the mercy of frosts and winds? To expect from youth these virtues and habits, in that degree of excellence to which in mature years they *may* be carried, would indeed be preposterous. Yet has youth many helps and aptitudes for the discharge of these difficult duties, which are withdrawn for the most part from the more advanced stages of life. For youth has its own wealth and independence; it is rich in health of body and animal spirits, in its sensibility to the impressions of the natural universe, in the conscious growth of knowledge, in lively sympathy and familiar communion with the generous actions recorded in history, and with the high passions of poetry; and, above all, youth is rich in the possession of time, and the accompanying consciousness of freedom and power. The young man feels that he stands at a distance from the season when his harvest is to be reaped,—that he has leisure and may look around—may defer both the choice and the execution of his purposes. If he makes an attempt and shall fail, new hopes immediately rush in, and new promises. Hence, in the happy confidence of his feelings, and in the elasticity of his spirit, neither worldly ambition, nor the love of praise, nor dread of censure, nor the necessity of worldly maintenance, nor any of those causes which tempt or compel the mind habitually to look out of itself for support; neither these, nor the passions of envy, fear, hatred, despondency, and the rankling of disappointed hopes (all which in after life give birth to, and regulate, the efforts of men, and determine their opinions), have power to preside over the

choice of the young, if the disposition be not naturally bad, or the circumstances have not been in an uncommon degree unfavourable.

In contemplation, then, of this disinterested and free condition of the youthful mind, I deem it in many points peculiarly capable of searching into itself, and of profiting by a few simple questions—such as these that follow. Am I chiefly gratified by the exertion of my power from the pure pleasure of intellectual activity, and from the knowledge thereby acquired? In other words, to what degree do I value my faculties and my attainments for their own sakes? or are they chiefly prized by me on account of the distinction which they confer, or the superiority which they give me over others? Am I aware that immediate influence and a general acknowledgement of merit are no necessary adjuncts of a successful adherence to study and meditation, in those departments of knowledge which are of most value to mankind? that a recompense of honours and emoluments is far less to be expected—in fact, that there is little natural connection between them? Have I perceived this truth? and, perceiving it, does the countenance of philosophy continue to appear as bright and beautiful in my eyes?—has no haze bedimmed it? has no cloud passed over and hidden from me that look which was before so encouraging? Knowing that it is my duty, and feeling that it is my inclination, to mingle as a social being with my fellow men; prepared also to submit cheerfully to the necessity that will probably exist of relinquishing, for the purpose of gaining a livelihood, the greatest portion of my time to employments where I shall have little or no choice how or when I am to act; have I, at this moment, when I stand as it were upon the

threshold of the busy world, a clear intuition of that pre-eminence in which virtue and truth (involving in this latter word the sanctities of religion) sit enthroned above all dominations and dignities which, in various degrees of exaltation, rule over the desires of men?—Do I feel that, if their solemn mandates shall be forgotten, or disregarded, or denied the obedience due to them when opposed to others, I shall not only have lived for no good purpose, but that I shall have sacrificed my birthright as a rational being; and that every other acquisition will be a bane and a disgrace to me? This is not spoken with reference to such sacrifices as present themselves to the youthful imagination in the shape of crimes, acts by which the conscience is violated; such a thought, I know, would be recoiled from at once, not without indignation; but I write in the spirit of the ancient fable of Prodicus, representing the choice of Hercules.—Here is the WORLD, a female figure approaching at the head of a train of willing or giddy followers:—her air and deportment are at once careless, remiss, self-satisfied, and haughty:—and there is INTELLECTUAL PROWESS, with a pale cheek and serene brow, leading in chains Truth, her beautiful and modest captive. The one makes her salutation with a discourse of ease, pleasure, freedom, and domestic tranquillity; or, if she invite to labour, it is labour in the busy and beaten track, with assurance of the complacent regards of parents, friends, and of those with whom we associate. The promise also may be upon her lip of the huzzas of the multitude, of the smile of kings, and the munificent rewards of senates. The other does not venture to hold forth any of these allurements; she does not conceal from him whom she addresses the impediments, the disappointments, the

ignorance and prejudice which her follower will have to encounter, if devoted, when duty calls, to active life; and if to contemplative, she lays nakedly before him, a scheme of solitary and unremitting labour, a life of entire neglect perhaps, or assuredly a life exposed to scorn, insult, persecution, and hatred; but cheered by encouragement from a grateful few, by applauding conscience, and by a prophetic anticipation, perhaps, of fame—a late, though lasting consequence. Of these two, each in this manner soliciting you to become her adherent, you doubt not which to prefer;—but oh! the thought of moment is not preference, but the *degree* of preference; the passionate and pure choice the inward sense of absolute and unchangeable devotion.

I spoke of a few simple questions—the question involved in this deliberation *is* simple; but at the same time it is high and awful: and I would gladly know whether an answer can be returned satisfactory to the mind.—We will for a moment suppose that it can not; that there is a startling and a hesitation.—Are we then to despond? to retire from all contest? and to reconcile ourselves at once to cares without generous hope, and to efforts in which there is no more moral life than that which is found in the business and labours of the unfavoured and unaspiring many? No—but, if the enquiry have not been on just grounds satisfactorily answered, we may refer confidently our youth to that nature of which he deems himself an enthusiastic follower, and one who wishes to continue no less faithful and enthusiastic.—We would tell him that there are paths which he has not trodden; recesses which he has not penetrated; that there is a beauty which he has not seen, a pathos which he has not felt—a sublimity to which he hath not been raised. If he have trembled,

because there has occasionally taken place in him a lapse, of which he is conscious; if he foresee open or secret attacks, which he has had intimations that he will neither be strong enough to resist, nor watchful enough to elude, let him not hastily ascribe this weakness, this deficiency, and the painful apprehensions accompanying them, in any degree to the virtues or noble qualities with which youth by nature is furnished; but let him first be assured, before he looks about for the means of attaining the insight, the discriminating powers, and the confirmed wisdom of manhood, that his soul has more to demand of the appropriate excellences of youth, than youth has yet supplied to it;—that the evil under which he labours is not a superabundance of the instincts and the animating spirit of that age, but a falling short, or a failure.—But what can he gain from this admonition? he cannot recall past time; he cannot begin his journey afresh; he cannot untwist the links by which, in no undelightful harmony, images and sentiments are wedded in his mind. Granted that the sacred light of childhood is and must be for him no more than a remembrance. He may, notwithstanding, be remanded to nature; and with trustworthy hopes; founded less upon his sentient than upon his intellectual being—to nature, not as leading on insensibly to the society of reason; but to reason and will, as leading back to the wisdom of nature. A reunion, in this order accomplished, will bring reformation and timely support; and the two powers of reason and nature, thus reciprocally teacher and taught, may advance together in a track to which there is no limit.

We have been discoursing (by implication at least) of infancy, childhood, boyhood, and youth, of pleasures lying upon the unfolding intellect plenteously

as morning dew-drops—of knowledge inhaled insensibly like a fragrance—of dispositions stealing into the spirit like music from unknown quarters—of images uncalled for and rising up like exhalations—of hopes plucked like beautiful wild flowers from the ruined tombs that border the high-ways of antiquity, to make a garland for a living forehead;—in a word, we have been treating of nature as a teacher of truth through joy and through gladness, and as a creatress of the faculties by a process of smoothness and delight. We have made no mention of fear, shame, sorrow, nor of ungovernable and vexing thoughts; because, although these have been and have done mighty service, they are overlooked in that stage of life when youth is passing into manhood—overlooked, or forgotten. We now apply for succour which we need, to a faculty that works after a different course: that faculty is reason: she gives much spontaneously, but she seeks for more; she works by thought, through feeling; yet in thoughts she begins and ends.

A familiar incident may elucidate this contrast in the operations of nature, may render plain the manner in which a process of intellectual improvements, the reverse of that which nature pursues, is by reason introduced: There never perhaps existed a school-boy, who, having, when he retired to rest, carelessly blown out his candle, and having chanced to notice, as he lay upon his bed in the ensuing darkness, the sullen light which had survived the extinguished flame, did not, at some time or other, watch that light as if his mind were bound to it by a spell. It fades and revives—gathers to a point—seems as if it would go out in a moment—again recovers its strength, nay becomes brighter than before: it continues to shine with an endurance,

which in its apparent weakness is a mystery—it protracts its existence so long, clinging to the power which supports it, that the observer, who had lain down in his bed so easy-minded, becomes sad and melancholy: his sympathies are touched—it is to him an intimation and an image of departing human life,—the thought comes nearer to him—it is the life of a venerated parent, of a beloved brother or sister, or of an aged domestic; who are gone to the grave, or whose destiny it soon may be thus to linger, thus to hang upon the last point of mortal existence, thus finally to depart and be seen no more.—This is nature teaching seriously and sweetly through the affections, melting the heart, and, through that instinct of tenderness, developing the understanding.—In this instance the object of solicitude is the bodily life of another. Let us accompany this same boy to that period between youth and manhood, when a solicitude may be awakened for the moral life of himself.—Are there any powers by which, beginning with a sense of inward decay that affects not however the natural life, he could call up to mind the same image and hang over it with an equal interest as a visible type of his own perishing spirit?—Oh! surely, if the being of the individual be under his own care—if it be his first care—if duty begin from the point of accountableness to our conscience, and, through that, to God and human nature;—if without such primary sense of duty, all secondary care of teacher, of friend, or parent, must be baseless and fruitless; if, lastly, the motions of the soul transcend in worth those of the animal functions, nay, give to them their sole value; then truly are there such powers; and the image of the dying taper may be recalled and contemplated, though with no sadness in the nerves,

no disposition to tears, no unconquerable sighs, yet with a melancholy in the soul, a sinking inward into ourselves from thought to thought, a steady remonstrance, and a high resolve.—Let then the youth go back, as occasion will permit, to nature and to solitude, thus admonished by reason, and relying upon this newly acquired support. A world of fresh sensations will gradually open upon him as his mind puts off its infirmities, and as instead of being propelled restlessly towards others in admiration, or too hasty love, he makes it his prime business to understand himself. New sensations, I affirm, will be opened out—pure, and sanctioned by that reason which is their original author; and precious feelings of disinterested, that is self-disregarding joy and love may be regenerated and restored:—and, in this sense, he may be said to measure back the track of life he has trod.

In such disposition of mind let the youth return to the visible universe; and to conversation with ancient books; and to those, if such there be, which in the present day breathe the ancient spirit: and let him feed upon that beauty which unfolds itself, *not* to his eye as it sees carelessly the things which cannot possibly go unseen, and are remembered or not as accident shall decide, but to the thinking mind; which searches, discovers, and treasures up,—infusing by meditation into the objects with which it converses an intellectual life; whereby they remain planted in the memory, now, and for ever. Hitherto the youth, I suppose, has been content for the most part to look at his own mind, after the manner in which he ranges along the stars in the firmament with naked unaided sight: let him now apply the telescope of art—to call the invisible stars out of their hiding places; and let him

endeavour to look through the system of his being, with the organ of reason; summoned to penetrate, as far as it has power, in discovery of the impelling forces and the governing laws.

These expectations are not immoderate: they demand nothing more than the perception of a few plain truths; namely, that knowledge efficacious for the production of virtue, is the ultimate end of all effort, the sole dispenser of complacency and repose. A perception also is implied of the inherent superiority of contemplation to action. The Friend does not in this contradict his own words, where he has said heretofore, that 'doubtless it is nobler to Act than to Think'. In those words, it was his purpose to censure that barren contemplation, which rests satisfied with itself in cases where the thoughts are of such quality that they may be, and ought to be, embodied in action. But he speaks now of the general superiority of thought to action;—as preceding and governing all action that moves to salutary purposes: and, secondly, as leading to elevation, the absolute possession of the individual mind, and to a consistency or harmony of the being within itself, which no outward agency can reach to disturb or to impair:—and lastly as producing works of pure science; or of the combined faculties of imagination, feeling, and reason;—works which, both from their independence in their origin upon accident, their nature, their duration, and the wide spread of their influence, are entitled rightly to take place of the noblest and most beneficent deeds of heroes, statesmen, legislators, or warriors.

Yet, beginning from the perception of this established superiority, we do not suppose that the youth, whom we wish to guide and encourage, is to be insensible to those influences of wealth, or rank, or

station, by which the bulk of mankind are swayed. Our eyes have not been fixed upon virtue which lies apart from human nature, or transcends it. In fact there is no such virtue. We neither suppose nor wish him to undervalue or slight these distinctions as modes of power, things that may enable him to be more useful to his contemporaries; nor as gratifications that may confer dignity upon his living person, and, through him, upon those who love him; nor as they may connect his name, through a family to be founded by his success, in a closer chain of gratitude with some portion of posterity, who shall speak of him, as among their ancestry, with a more tender interest than the mere general bond of patriotism or humanity would supply. We suppose no indifference to, much less a contempt of, these rewards; but let them have their due place; let it be ascertained, when the soul is searched into, that they are only an auxiliary motive to exertion, never the principal or originating force. If this be too much to expect from a youth who, I take for granted, possesses no ordinary endowments, and whom circumstances with respect to the more dangerous passions have favoured, then, indeed, must the noble spirit of the country be wasted away: then would our institutions be deplorable, and the education prevalent among us utterly vile and debasing.

But my correspondent, who drew forth these thoughts, has said rightly, that the character of the age may not without injustice be thus branded: he will not deny that, without speaking of other countries, there is in these islands, in the departments of natural philosophy, of mechanic ingenuity, in the general activities of the country, and in the particular excellence of individual minds, in high

stations civil or military, enough to excite admiration and love in the sober-minded, and more than enough to intoxicate the youthful and inexperienced.—— I will compare, then, an aspiring youth, leaving the schools in which he has been disciplined, and preparing to bear a part in the concerns of the world, I will compare him in this season of eager admiration, to a newly-invested knight appearing with his blank unsignalized shield, upon some day of solemn tournament, at the court of the Fairy-Queen, as that sovereignty was conceived to exist by the moral and imaginative genius of our divine Spenser. He does not himself immediately enter the lists as a combatant, but he looks round him with a beating heart, dazzled by the gorgeous pageantry, the banners, the impresses, the ladies of overcoming beauty, the persons of the knights—now first seen by him, the fame of whose actions is carried by the traveller, like merchandize, through the world, and resounded upon the harp of the minstrel.—But I am not at liberty to make this comparison. If a youth were to begin his career in such an assemblage, with such examples to guide and to animate, it will be pleaded, there would be no cause for apprehension: he could not falter, he could not be misled. But ours is, notwithstanding its manifold excellences, a degenerate age: and recreant knights are among us, far outnumbering the true. A false Gloriana in these days imposes worthless services, which they who perform them, in their blindness, know not to be such; and which are recompensed by rewards as worthless—yet eagerly grasped at, as if they were the immortal guerdon of virtue.

I have in this declaration insensibly overstepped the limits which I had determined not to pass:—let me be forgiven; for it is hope which hath carried

me forward. In such a mixed assemblage as our age presents, with its genuine merit and its large overbalance of alloy, I may boldly ask into what errors, either with respect to person or thing, could a young man fall, who had sincerely entered upon the course of moral discipline which has been recommended, and to which the condition of youth, it has been proved, is favourable? His opinions could nowhere deceive him beyond the point to which, after a season, he would find that it was salutary for him to have been deceived. For, as that man cannot set a right value upon health who has never known sickness, nor feel the blessing of ease who has been through his life a stranger to pain, so can there be no confirmed and passionate love of truth for him who has not experienced the hollowness of error.—Range against each other as advocates, oppose as combatants, two several intellects, each strenuously asserting doctrines which he sincerely believes; but the one contending for the worth and beauty of that garment which the other has outgrown and cast away. Mark the superiority, the ease, the dignity, on the side of the more advanced mind, how he overlooks his subject, commands it from centre to circumference, and hath the same thorough knowledge of the tenets which his adversary, with impetuous zeal, but in confusion also, and thrown off his guard at every turn of the argument, is labouring to maintain! If it be a question of the fine arts (poetry for instance) the riper mind not only sees that his opponent is deceived; but, what is of far more importance, sees *how* he is deceived. The imagination stands before him with all its imperfections laid open; as duped by shews, enslaved by words, corrupted by mistaken delicacy and false refinement,—as not having even

attended with care to the reports of the senses, and therefore deficient grossly in the rudiments of her own power. He has noted how, as a supposed necessary condition, the understanding sleeps in order that the fancy may dream. Studied in the history of society, and versed in the secret laws of thought, he can pass regularly through all the gradations, can pierce infallibly all the windings, which false taste through ages has pursued—from the very time when first, through inexperience, heedlessness, or affectation, she took her departure from the side of truth, her original parent.——Can a disputant thus accoutred be withstood?—to whom, further, every movement in the thoughts of his antagonist is revealed by the light of his own experience; who, therefore, sympathises with weakness gently, and wins his way by forbearance; and hath, when needful, an irresistible power of onset,—arising from gratitude to the truth which he vindicates, not merely as a positive good for mankind, but as his own especial rescue and redemption.

I might here conclude: but my correspondent towards the close of his letter, has written so feelingly upon the advantages to be derived, in his estimation, from a living instructor, that I must not leave this part of the subject without a word of direct notice. The Friend cited, some time ago, a passage from the prose works of Milton, eloquently describing the manner in which good and evil grow up together in the field of the world almost inseparably; and insisting, consequently, upon the knowledge and survey of vice as necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth. If this be so, and I have been reasoning to the same effect in the preceding paragraph, the fact, and the

thoughts which it may suggest, will, if rightly applied, tend to moderate an anxiety for the guidance of a more experienced or superior mind. The advantage, where it is possessed, is far from being an absolute good: nay, such a preceptor, ever at hand, might prove an oppression not to be thrown off, and a fatal hindrance. Grant that in the general tenor of his intercourse with his pupil he is forbearing and circumspect, inasmuch as he is rich in that knowledge (above all other necessary for a teacher) which cannot exist without a liveliness of memory, preserving for him an unbroken image of the winding, excursive, and often retrograde course, along which his own intellect has passed. Grant that, furnished with these distinct remembrances, he wishes that the mind of his pupil should be free to luxuriate in the enjoyments, loves, and admirations appropriate to its age; that he is not in haste to kill what he knows will in due time die of itself; or be transmuted, and put on a nobler form and higher faculties otherwise unattainable. In a word, that the teacher is governed habitually by the wisdom of patience waiting with pleasure. Yet perceiving how much the outward help of art can facilitate the progress of nature, he may be betrayed into many unnecessary or pernicious mistakes where he deems his interference warranted by substantial experience. And in spite of all his caution, remarks may drop insensibly from him which shall wither in the mind of his pupil a generous sympathy, destroy a sentiment of approbation or dislike, not merely innocent but salutary; and for the inexperienced disciple how many pleasures may be thus cut off, what joy, what admiration, and what love! while in their stead are introduced into the ingenuous mind misgivings, a mistrust

of its own evidence, dispositions to affect to feel where there can be no real feeling, indecisive judgements, a superstructure of opinions that has no base to support it, and words uttered by rote with the impertinence of a parrot or a mocking-bird, yet which may not be listened to with the same indifference, as they cannot be heard without some feeling of moral disapprobation.

These results, I contend, whatever may be the benefit to be derived from such an enlightened teacher, are in their degree inevitable. And by this process, humility and docile dispositions may exist towards the master, endued as he is with the power which personal presence confers; but at the same time they will be liable to overstep their due bounds, and to degenerate into passiveness and prostration of mind. This towards him! while, with respect to other living men, nay even to the mighty spirits of past times, there may be associated with such weakness a want of modesty and humility. Insensibly may steal in presumption and a habit of sitting in judgement in cases where no sentiment ought to have existed but diffidence or veneration. Such virtues are the sacred attributes of youth; its appropriate calling is not to distinguish in the fear of being deceived or degraded, not to analyze with scrupulous minuteness, but to accumulate in genial confidence; its instinct, its safety, its benefit, its glory, is to love, to admire, to feel, and to labour. Nature has irrevocably decreed, that our prime dependence in all stages of life after infancy and childhood have been passed through (nor do I know that this latter ought to be excepted) must be upon our own minds; and that the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and oftentimes returning upon itself.

What has been said is a mere sketch; and that only of a part of the interesting country into which we have been led: but my correspondent will be able to enter the paths that have been pointed out. Should he do this and advance steadily for a while, he needs not fear any deviations from the truth which will be finally injurious to him. He will not long have his admiration fixed upon unworthy objects; he will neither be clogged nor drawn aside by the love of friends or kindred, betraying his understanding through his affections; he will neither be bowed down by conventional arrangements of manners producing too often a lifeless decency: nor will the rock of his spirit wear away in the endless beating of the waves of the world: neither will that portion of his own time, which he must surrender to labours by which his livelihood is to be earned or his social duties performed, be unprofitable to himself indirectly, while it is directly useful to others: for that time has been primarily surrendered through an act of obedience to a moral law established by himself, and therefore he moves then also along the orbit of perfect liberty.

Let it be remembered, that the advice requested does not relate to the government of the more dangerous passions, or to the fundamental principles of right and wrong as acknowledged by the universal conscience of mankind. I may therefore assure my youthful correspondent, if he will endeavour to look into himself in the manner which I have exhorted him to do, that in him the wish will be realized, to him in due time the prayer granted, which was uttered by that living teacher of whom he speaks with gratitude as of a benefactor, when, in his character of philosophical poet, having thought of morality as implying in its essence voluntary obe-

dience, and producing the effect of order, he transfers in the transport of imagination, the law of moral to physical natures, and, having contemplated, through the medium of that order, all modes of existence as subservient to one spirit, concludes his address to the power of Duty in the following words:—

To humbler functions, awful Power!
I call thee; I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live!

M. M.

UPON EPITAPHS (1)

(1810)

It need scarcely be said, that an Epitaph presupposes a Monument, upon which it is to be engraven. Almost all Nations have wished that certain external signs should point out the places where their dead are interred. Among savage tribes unacquainted with letters this has mostly been done either by rude stones placed near the graves, or by mounds of earth raised over them. This custom proceeded obviously from a twofold desire; first, to guard the remains of the deceased from irreverent approach or from savage violation: and, secondly, to preserve their memory. 'Never any', says Camden, 'neglected burial but some savage nations, as the Bactrians, which cast their dead to the dogs; some varlet philosophers, as Diogenes, who desired to be devoured of fishes; some dissolute courtiers, as

Maecenas, who was wont to say, "Non tumulum curo; sepelit natura relictos."

'I'm careless of a grave:—Nature her dead will save.'

As soon as nations had learned the use of letters, epitaphs were inscribed upon these monuments; in order that their intention might be more surely and adequately fulfilled. I have derived monuments and epitaphs from two sources of feeling: but these do in fact resolve themselves into one. The invention of epitaphs, Weever, in his *Discourse of Funeral Monuments*, says rightly, 'proceeded from the presage or fore-feeling of immortality, implanted in all men naturally, and is referred to the scholars of Linus the Theban poet, who flourished about the year of the world two thousand seven hundred; who first bewailed this Linus their Master, when he was slain, in doleful verses, then called of him Oelina, afterwards Epitaphia, for that they were first sung at burials, after engraved upon the sepulchres.'

And, verily, without the consciousness of a principle of immortality in the human soul, Man could never have had awakened in him the desire to live in the remembrance of his fellows: mere love, or the yearning of kind towards kind, could not have produced it. The dog or horse perishes in the field, or in the stall, by the side of his companions, and is incapable of anticipating the sorrow with which his surrounding associates shall bemoan his death, or pine for his loss; he cannot pre-conceive this regret, he can form no thought of it; and therefore cannot possibly have a desire to leave such regret or remembrance behind him. Add to the principle of love which exists in the inferior animals, the faculty of reason which exists in Man alone; will the conjunc-

tion of these account for the desire? Doubtless it is a necessary consequence of this conjunction; yet not I think as a direct result, but only to be come at through an intermediate thought, viz. that of an intimation or assurance within us, that some part of our nature is imperishable. At least the precedence, in order of birth, of one feeling to the other, is unquestionable. If we look back upon the days of childhood, we shall find that the time is not in remembrance when, with respect to our own individual Being, the mind was without this assurance; whereas, the wish to be remembered by our friends or kindred after death, or even in absence, is, as we shall discover, a sensation that does not form itself till the *social* feelings have been developed, and the Reason has connected itself with a wide range of objects. Forlorn, and cut off from communication with the best part of his nature, must that man be, who should derive the sense of immortality, as it exists in the mind of a child, from the same unthinking gaiety or liveliness of animal spirits with which the lamb in the meadow, or any other irrational creature is endowed; who should ascribe it, in short, to blank ignorance in the child; to an inability arising from the imperfect state of his faculties to come, in any point of his being, into contact with a notion of death; or to an unreflecting acquiescence in what had been instilled into him! Has such an unfolder of the mysteries of nature, though he may have forgotten his former self, ever noticed the early, obstinate, and unappeasable inquisitiveness of children upon the subject of origination? This single fact proves outwardly the monstrousness of those suppositions: for, if we had no direct external testimony that the minds of very young children meditate feelingly upon death and immortality, these inquiries,

which we all know they are perpetually making concerning the *whence*, do necessarily include correspondent habits of interrogation concerning the *whither*. Origin and tendency are notions inseparably co-relative. Never did a child stand by the side of a running stream, pondering within himself what power was the feeder of the perpetual current, from what never-wearied sources the body of water was supplied, but he must have been inevitably propelled to follow this question by another: 'Towards what abyss is it in progress? what receptacle can contain the mighty influx?' And the spirit of the answer must have been, though the word might be sea or ocean, accompanied perhaps with an image gathered from a map, or from the real object in nature—these might have been the *letter*, but the *spirit* of the answer must have been *as* inevitably,—a receptacle without bounds or dimensions;—nothing less than infinity. We may, then, be justified in asserting, that the sense of immortality, if not a co-existent and twin birth with Reason, is among the earliest of her offspring: and we may further assert, that from these conjoined, and under their countenance, the human affections are gradually formed and opened out. This is not the place to enter into the recesses of these investigations; but the subject requires me here to make a plain avowal, that, for my own part, it is to me inconceivable, that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death, and were in the habit of having that impression daily renewed and its accompanying feeling brought home to ourselves, and to those we love; if the same were not counteracted by those communications with our internal Being, which are anterior

to all these experiences, and with which revelation coincides, and has through that coincidence alone (for otherwise it could not possess it) a power to affect us. I confess, with me the conviction is absolute, that, if the impression and sense of death were not thus counterbalanced, such a hollowness would pervade the whole system of things, such a want of correspondence and consistency, a disproportion so astounding betwixt means and ends, that there could be no repose, no joy. Were we to grow up unfostered by this genial warmth, a frost would chill the spirit, so penetrating and powerful, that there could be no motions of the life of love; and infinitely less could we have any wish to be remembered after we had passed away from a world in which each man had moved about like a shadow.—If, then, in a creature endowed with the faculties of foresight and reason, the social affections could not have unfolded themselves uncountenanced by the faith that Man is an immortal being; and if, consequently, neither could the individual dying have had a desire to survive in the remembrance of his fellows, nor on their side could they have felt a wish to preserve for future times vestiges of the departed; it follows, as a final inference, that without the belief in immortality, wherein these several desires originate, neither monuments nor epitaphs, in affectionate or laudatory commemoration of the deceased, could have existed in the world.

Simonides, it is related, upon landing in a strange country, found the corse of an unknown person lying by the sea-side; he buried it, and was honoured throughout Greece for the piety of that act. Another ancient Philosopher, chancing to fix his eyes upon a dead body, regarded the same with slight, if not with contempt; saying, 'See the shell of the flown

bird !' But it is not to be supposed that the moral and tender-hearted Simonides was incapable of the lofty movements of thought, to which that other Sage gave way at the moment while his soul was intent only upon the indestructible being; nor, on the other hand, that he, in whose sight a lifeless human body was of no more value than the worthless shell from which the living fowl had departed, would not, in a different mood of mind, have been affected by those earthly considerations which had incited the philosophic Poet to the performance of that pious duty. And with regard to this latter we may be assured that, if he had been destitute of the capability of communing with the more exalted thoughts that appertain to human nature, he would have cared no more for the corse of the stranger than for the dead body of a seal or porpoise which might have been cast up by the waves. We respect the corporeal frame of Man, not merely because it is the habitation of a rational, but of an immortal Soul. Each of these Sages was in sympathy with the best feelings of our nature; feelings which, though they seem opposite to each other, have another and a finer connexion than that of contrast.—It is a connexion formed through the subtle progress by which, both in the natural and the moral world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries, and things revolve upon each other. As, in sailing upon the orb of this planet, a voyage towards the regions where the sun sets, conducts gradually to the quarter where we have been accustomed to behold it come forth at its rising; and, in like manner, a voyage towards the east, the birthplace in our imagination of the morning, leads finally to the quarter where the sun is last seen when he departs from our eyes; so the contemplative Soul, travelling in the direction of mor-

tality, advances to the country of everlasting life; and, in like manner, may she continue to explore those cheerful tracts, till she is brought back, for her advantage and benefit, to the land of transitory things—of sorrow and of tears.

On a midway point, therefore, which commands the thoughts and feelings of the two Sages whom we have represented in contrast, does the Author of that species of composition, the laws of which it is our present purpose to explain, take his stand. Accordingly, recurring to the twofold desire of guarding the remains of the deceased and preserving their memory, it may be said that a sepulchral monument is a tribute to a man as a human being; and that an epitaph (in the ordinary meaning attached to the word) includes this general feeling and something more; and is a record to preserve the memory of the dead, as a tribute due to his individual worth, for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living: which record is to be accomplished, not in a general manner, but, where it can, in *close connexion with the bodily remains of the deceased*: and these, it may be added, among the modern nations of Europe, are deposited within, or contiguous to, their places of worship. In ancient times, as is well known, it was the custom to bury the dead beyond the walls of towns and cities; and among the Greeks and Romans they were frequently interred by the way-sides.

I could here pause with pleasure, and invite the Reader to indulge with me in contemplation of the advantages which must have attended such a practice. We might ruminate upon the beauty which the monuments, thus placed, must have borrowed from the surrounding images of nature—from the trees, the wild flowers, from a stream running perhaps

within sight or hearing, from the beaten road stretching its weary length hard by. Many tender similitudes must these objects have presented to the mind of the traveller leaning upon one of the tombs, or reposing in the coolness of its shade, whether he had halted from weariness or in compliance with the invitation, 'Pause, Traveller!' so often found upon the monuments. And to its epitaph also must have been supplied strong appeals to visible appearances or immediate impressions, lively and affecting analogies of life as a journey—death as a sleep overcoming the tired wayfarer—of misfortune as a storm that falls suddenly upon him—of beauty as a flower that passeth away, or of innocent pleasure as one that may be gathered—of virtue that standeth firm as a rock against the beating waves;—of hope 'undermined insensibly like the poplar by the side of the river that has fed it', or blasted in a moment like a pine-tree by the stroke of lightning upon the mountain-top—of admonitions and heart-stirring remembrances, like a refreshing breeze that comes without warning, or the taste of the waters of an unexpected fountain. These, and similar suggestions, must have given, formerly, to the language of the senseless stone a voice enforced and endeared by the benignity of that nature with which it was in unison.—We, in modern times, have lost much of these advantages; and they are but in a small degree counterbalanced to the inhabitants of large towns and cities, by the custom of depositing the dead within, or contiguous to, their places of worship; however splendid or imposing may be the appearance of those edifices, or however interesting or salutary the recollections associated with them. Even were it not true that tombs lose their monitory virtue when thus obtruded upon the notice of men

occupied with the cares of the world, and too often sullied and defiled by those cares, yet still, when death is in our thoughts, nothing can make amends for the want of the soothing influences of nature, and for the absence of those types of renovation and decay, which the fields and woods offer to the notice of the serious and contemplative mind. To feel the force of this sentiment, let a man only compare in imagination the unsightly manner in which our monuments are crowded together in the busy, noisy, unclean, and almost grassless churchyard of a large town, with the still seclusion of a Turkish cemetery, in some remote place; and yet further sanctified by the grove of cypress in which it is embosomed. Thoughts in the same temper as these have already been expressed with true sensibility by an ingenious Poet of the present day. The subject of his poem is 'All Saints' Church, Derby': he has been deploring the forbidding and unseemly appearance of its burial-ground, and uttering a wish, that in past times the practice had been adopted of interring the inhabitants of large towns in the country:—

Then in some rural, calm, sequestered spot,
Where healing Nature her benignant look
Ne'er changes, save at that lorn season, when,
With tresses drooping o'er her sable stole,
She yearly mourns the mortal doom of man,
Her noblest work (so Israel's virgins erst,
With annual moan upon the mountains wept
Their fairest gone), there in that rural scene,
So placid, so congenial to the wish
The Christian feels, of peaceful rest within
The silent grave, I would have stayed.

. . . . . .

—wandered forth, where the cold dew of heaven

Lay on the humbler graves around, what time
The pale moon gazed upon the turfy mounds,
Pensive, as though like me, in lonely muse,
'Twere brooding on the dead inhumed beneath.
There while with him, the holy man of Uz,
O'er human destiny I sympathized,
Counting the long, long periods prophecy
Decrees to roll, ere the great day arrives
Of resurrection, oft the blue-eyed Spring
Had met me with her blossoms, as the Dove,
Of old, returned with olive leaf, to cheer
The Patriarch mourning o'er a world destroyed:
And I would bless her visit; for to me
'Tis sweet to trace the consonance that links
As one, the works of Nature and the word
Of God.—

JOHN EDWARDS.

A village churchyard, lying as it does in the lap of nature, may indeed be most favourably contrasted with that of a town of crowded population; and sepulture therein combines many of the best tendencies which belong to the mode practised by the Ancients, with others peculiar to itself. The sensations of pious cheerfulness, which attend the celebration of the sabbath-day in rural places, are profitably chastised by the sight of the graves of kindred and friends, gathered together in that general home towards which the thoughtful yet happy spectators themselves are journeying. Hence a parish-church, in the stillness of the country, is a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead; a point to which are habitually referred the nearest concerns of both.

As, then, both in cities and in villages, the dead are deposited in close connexion with our places of

worship, with us the composition of an epitaph naturally turns, still more than among the nations of antiquity, upon the most serious and solemn affections of the human mind; upon departed worth—upon personal or social sorrow and admiration—upon religion, individual and social—upon time, and upon eternity. Accordingly, it suffices in ordinary cases, to secure a composition of this kind from censure, that it contain nothing that shall shock or be inconsistent with this spirit. But, to entitle an epitaph to praise, more than this is necessary. It ought to contain some thought or feeling belonging to the mortal or immortal part of our nature touchingly expressed; and if that be done, however general or even trite the sentiment may be, every man of pure mind will read the words with pleasure and gratitude. A husband bewails a wife; a parent breathes a sigh of disappointed hope over a lost child; a son utters a sentiment of filial reverence for a departed father or mother; a friend perhaps inscribes an encomium recording the companionable qualities, or the solid virtues, of the tenant of the grave, whose departure has left a sadness upon his memory. This and a pious admonition to the living, and a humble expression of Christian confidence in immortality, is the language of a thousand churchyards; and it does not often happen that anything, in a greater degree discriminate or appropriate to the dead or to the living, is to be found in them. This want of discrimination has been ascribed by Dr. Johnson, in his Essay upon the epitaphs of Pope, to two causes: first, the scantiness of the objects of human praise; and, secondly, the want of variety in the characters of men; or, to use his own words, 'to the fact, that the greater part of mankind have no character at

all.' Such language may be holden without blame among the generalities of common conversation; but does not become a critic and a moralist speaking seriously upon a serious subject. The objects of admiration in human nature are not scanty, but abundant: and every man has a character of his own, to the eye that has skill to perceive it. The real cause of the acknowledged want of discrimination in sepulchral memorials is this: That to analyse the characters of others, especially of those whom we love, is not a common or natural employment of men at any time. We are not anxious unerringly to understand the constitution of the minds of those who have soothed, who have cheered, who have supported us: with whom we have been long and daily pleased or delighted. The affections are their own justification. The light of love in our hearts is a satisfactory evidence that there is a body of worth in the minds of our friends or kindred, whence that light has proceeded. We shrink from the thought of placing their merits and defects to be weighed against each other in the nice balance of pure intellect; nor do we find much temptation to detect the shades by which a good quality or virtue is discriminated in them from an excellence known by the same general name as it exists in the mind of another; and, least of all, do we incline to these refinements when under the pressure of sorrow, admiration, or regret, or when actuated by any of those feelings which incite men to prolong the memory of their friends and kindred, by records placed in the bosom of the all-uniting and equalizing receptacle of the dead.

The first requisite, then, in an Epitaph is, that it should speak, in a tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of humanity as connected

with the subject of death—the source from which an epitaph proceeds—of death, and of life. To be born and to die are the two points in which all men feel themselves to be in absolute coincidence. This general language may be uttered so strikingly as to entitle an epitaph to high praise; yet it cannot lay claim to the highest unless other excellences be superadded. Passing through all intermediate steps, we will attempt to determine at once what these excellences are, and wherein consists the perfection of this species of composition.—It will be found to lie in a due proportion of the common or universal feeling of humanity to sensations excited by a distinct and clear conception, conveyed to the reader's mind, of the individual, whose death is deplored and whose memory is to be preserved; at least of his character as, after death, it appeared to those who loved him and lament his loss. The general sympathy ought to be quickened, provoked, and diversified, by particular thoughts, actions, images,—circumstances of age, occupation, manner of life, prosperity which the deceased had known, or adversity to which he had been subject; and these ought to be bound together and solemnized into one harmony by the general sympathy. The two powers should temper, restrain, and exalt each other. The reader ought to know who and what the man was whom he is called upon to think of with interest. A distinct conception should be given (implicitly where it can, rather than explicitly) of the individual lamented.—But the writer of an epitaph is not an anatomist, who dissects the internal frame of the mind; he is not even a painter, who executes a portrait at leisure and in entire tranquillity: his delineation, we must remember, is performed by the side of the grave; and, what is more, the grave of one whom he loves

and admires. What purity and brightness is that virtue clothed in, the image of which must no longer bless our living eyes! The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no—nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualizes and beautifies it; that takes away, indeed, but only to the end that the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely; may impress and affect the more. Shall we say, then, that this is not truth, not a faithful image; and that, accordingly, the purposes of commemoration cannot be answered? —It *is* truth, and of the highest order; for, though doubtless things are not apparent which did exist; yet, the object being looked at through this medium, parts and proportions are brought into distinct view which before had been only imperfectly or unconsciously seen: it is truth hallowed by love—the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living! This may easily be brought to the test. Let one whose eyes have been sharpened by personal hostility to discover what was amiss in the character of a good man, hear the tidings of his death, and what a change is wrought in a moment! Enmity melts away; and, as it disappears, unsightliness, disproportion, and deformity, vanish; and, through the influence of commiseration, a harmony of love and beauty succeeds. Bring such a man to the tombstone on which shall be inscribed an epitaph on his adversary, composed in the spirit which we have recommended. Would he turn from it as from an idle tale? No;—the thoughtful look, the sigh, and perhaps the involuntary tear, would testify that it had a sane, a generous, and good meaning; and that on the writer's mind had remained an impression which was a true abstract of the character

of the deceased; that his gifts and graces were remembered in the simplicity in which they ought to be remembered. The composition and quality of the mind of a virtuous man, contemplated by the side of the grave where his body is mouldering, ought to appear, and be felt as something midway between what he was on earth walking about with his living frailties, and what he may be presumed to be as a Spirit in heaven.

It suffices, therefore, that the trunk and the main branches of the worth of the deceased be boldly and unaffectedly represented. Any further detail, minutely and scrupulously pursued, especially if this be done with laborious and antithetic discriminations, must inevitably frustrate its own purpose; forcing the passing Spectator to this conclusion,—either that the dead did not possess the merits ascribed to him, or that they who have raised a monument to his memory, and must therefore be supposed to have been closely connected with him, were incapable of perceiving those merits; or at least during the act of composition had lost sight of them; for, the understanding having been so busy in its petty occupation, how could the heart of the mourner be other than cold? and in either of these cases, whether the fault be on the part of the buried person or the survivors, the memorial is unaffecting and profitless.

Much better is it to fall short in discrimination than to pursue it too far, or to labour it unfeelingly. For in no place are we so much disposed to dwell upon these points, of nature and condition, wherein all men resemble each other, as in the temple where the universal Father is worshipped, or by the side of the grave which gathers all human beings to itself, and 'equalizes the lofty and the low'. We

suffer and we weep with the same heart; we love and are anxious for one another in one spirit; our hopes look to the same quarter; and the virtues by which we are all to be furthered and supported, as patience, meekness, good-will, justice, temperance, and temperate desires, are in an equal degree the concern of us all. Let an Epitaph, then, contain at least these acknowledgements to our common nature; nor let the sense of their importance be sacrificed to a balance of opposite qualities or minute distinctions in individual character; which if they do not (as will for the most part be the case), when examined, resolve themselves into a trick of words, will, even when they are true and just, for the most part be grievously out of place; for, as it is probable that few only have explored these intricacies of human nature, so can the tracing of them be interesting only to a few. But an epitaph is not a proud writing shut up for the studious; it is exposed to all—to the wise and the most ignorant; it is condescending, perspicuous, and lovingly solicits regard; its story and admonitions are brief, that the thoughtless, the busy, and indolent, may not be deterred, nor the impatient tired: the stooping old man cons the engraven record like a second horn-book;—the child is proud that he can read it;—and the stranger is introduced through its mediation to the company of a friend: it is concerning all, and for all:—in the churchyard it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it.

Yet, though the writer who would excite sympathy is bound in this case, more than in any other, to give proof that he himself has been moved, it is to be remembered, that to raise a monument is a sober and a reflective act; that the inscription which it bears

is intended to be permanent, and for universal perusal; and that, for this reason, the thoughts and feelings expressed should be permanent also—liberated from that weakness and anguish of sorrow which is in nature transitory, and which with instinctive decency retires from notice. The passions should be subdued, the emotions controlled; strong, indeed, but nothing ungovernable or wholly involuntary. Seemliness requires this, and truth requires it also: for how can the narrator otherwise be trusted? Moreover, a grave is a tranquillizing object: resignation in course of time springs up from it as naturally as the wild flowers, besprinkling the turf with which it may be covered, or gathering round the monument by which it is defended. The very form and substance of the monument which has received the inscription, and the appearance of the letters, testifying with what a slow and laborious hand they must have been engraven, might seem to reproach the author who had given way on this occasion to transports of mind, or to quick turns of conflicting passion; though the same might constitute the life and beauty of a funeral oration or elegiac poem.

These sensations and judgements, acted upon perhaps unconsciously, have been one of the main causes why epitaphs so often personate the deceased, and represent him as speaking from his own tombstone. The departed Mortal is introduced telling you himself that his pains are gone; that a state of rest is come; and he conjures you to weep for him no longer. He admonishes with the voice of one experienced in the vanity of those affections which are confined to earthly objects, and gives a verdict like a superior Being, performing the office of a judge, who has no temptations to mislead him, and whose decision cannot but be dispassionate. Thus is death

disarmed of its sting, and affliction unsubstantialized. By this tender fiction, the survivors bind themselves to a sedater sorrow, and employ the intervention of the imagination in order that the reason may speak her own language earlier than she would otherwise have been enabled to do. This shadowy interposition also harmoniously unites the two worlds of the living and the dead by their appropriate affections. And it may be observed, that here we have an additional proof of the propriety with which sepulchral inscriptions were referred to the consciousness of immortality as their primal source.

I do not speak with a wish to recommend that an epitaph should be cast in this mould preferably to the still more common one, in which what is said comes from the survivors directly; but rather to point out how natural those feelings are which have induced men, in all states and ranks of society, so frequently to adopt this mode. And this I have done chiefly in order that the laws, which ought to govern the composition of the other, may be better understood. This latter mode, namely, that in which the survivors speak in their own persons, seems to me upon the whole greatly preferable: as it admits a wider range of notices; and, above all, because, excluding the fiction which is the groundwork of the other, it rests upon a more solid basis.

Enough has been said to convey our notion of a perfect epitaph; but it must be borne in mind that one is meant which will best answer the *general* ends of that species of composition. According to the course pointed out, the worth of private life, through all varieties of situation and character, will be most honourably and profitably preserved in memory. Nor would the model recommended less suit public men, in all instances save of those persons who by the

greatness of their services in the employments of peace or war, or by the surpassing excellence of their works in art, literature, or science, have made themselves not only universally known, but have filled the heart of their country with everlasting gratitude. Yet I must here pause to correct myself. In describing the general tenor of thought which epitaphs ought to hold, I have omitted to say, that if it be the *actions* of a man, or even some *one* conspicuous or beneficial act of local or general utility, which have distinguished him, and excited a desire that he should be remembered, then, of course, ought the attention to be directed chiefly to those actions or that act: and such sentiments dwelt upon as naturally arise out of them or it. Having made this necessary distinction, I proceed.—The mighty benefactors of mankind, as they are not only known by the immediate survivors, but will continue to be known familiarly to latest posterity, do not stand in need of biographic sketches, in such a place; nor of delineations of character to individualize them. This is already done by their Works, in the memories of men. Their naked names, and a grand comprehensive sentiment of civic gratitude, patriotic love, or human admiration—or the utterance of some elementary principle most essential in the constitution of true virtue;—or a declaration touching that pious humility and self-abasement, which are ever most profound as minds are most susceptible of genuine exaltation—or an intuition, communicated in adequate words, of the sublimity of intellectual power;—these are the only tribute which can here be paid—the only offering that upon such an altar would not be unworthy.

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
The labour of an age in piled stones,

Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear Son of Memory, great Heir of Fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a livelong monument,
And so sepulchred, in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

UPON EPITAPHS (2)

Yet even these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.
Their name, their years, spelt by the unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply;
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

When a Stranger has walked round a Country Church-yard and glanced his eye over so many brief chronicles, as the tomb-stones usually contain, of faithful wives, tender husbands, dutiful children, and good men of all classes; he will be tempted to exclaim in the language of one of the characters of a modern Tale, in a similar situation, 'Where are all the *bad* people buried?' He may smile to himself an answer to this question, and may regret that it has intruded upon him so soon. For my own part such has been my lot; and indeed a man, who is in the habit of suffering his mind to be carried passively towards truth as well as of going with conscious effort in search of it, may be forgiven, if he has sometimes insensibly yielded to the delusion of those flattering

recitals, and found a pleasure in believing that the prospect of real life had been as fair as it was in that picture represented. And such a transitory oversight will without difficulty be forgiven by those who have observed a trivial fact in daily life, namely, how apt, in a series of calm weather, we are to forget that rain and storms have been, and will return to interrupt any scheme of business or pleasure which our minds are occupied in arranging. Amid the quiet of a church-yard thus decorated as it seemed by the hand of Memory, and shining, if I may so say, in the light of love, I have been affected by sensations akin to those which have risen in my mind while I have been standing by the side of a smooth sea, on a Summer's day. It is such a happiness to have, in an unkind world, one enclosure where the voice of Detraction is not heard; where the traces of evil inclinations are unknown; where contentment prevails, and there is no jarring tone in the peaceful concert of amity and gratitude. I have been roused from this reverie by a consciousness suddenly flashing upon me, of the anxieties, the perturbations, and in many instances, the vices and rancorous dispositions, by which the hearts of those who lie under so smooth a surface and so fair an outside have been agitated. The image of an unruffled sea has still remained; but my fancy has penetrated into the depths of that sea,—with accompanying thoughts of shipwreck, of the destruction of the mariner's hopes, the bones of drowned men heaped together, monsters of the deep, and all the hideous and confused sights which Clarence saw in his dream.

Nevertheless, I have been able to return (and who may *not*?) to a steady contemplation of the benign influence of such a favourable Register lying open to the eyes of all. Without being so far lulled as

to imagine I saw in a village church-yard the eye or central point of a rural Arcadia, I have felt that with all the vague and general expressions of love, gratitude, and praise, with which it is usually crowded, it is a far more faithful representation of homely life as existing among a community in which circumstances have not been untoward, than any report which might be made by a rigorous observer deficient in that spirit of forbearance and those kindly prepossessions, without which human life can in no condition be profitably looked at or described. For we must remember that it is the nature of vice to force itself upon notice, both in the act and by its consequences. Drunkenness, cruelty, brutal manners, sensuality and impiety, thoughtless prodigality and idleness, are obstreperous while they are in the height and heyday of their enjoyment; and when that is passed away, long and obtrusive is the train of misery which they draw after them. But on the contrary, the virtues, especially those of humble life, are retired; and many of the highest must be sought for or they will be overlooked. Industry, economy, temperance, and cleanliness, are indeed made obvious by flourishing fields, rosy complexions, and smiling countenances; but how few know anything of the trials to which men in a lonely condition are subject, or of the steady and triumphant manner in which those trials are often sustained, but they themselves? The afflictions which peasants and rural citizens have to struggle with are for the most part secret; the tears which they wipe away, and the sighs which they stifle,—this is all a labour of privacy. In fact their victories are to themselves known only imperfectly; for it is inseparable from virtue, in the pure sense of the word, to be unconscious of the might of her own prowess. This is true of minds the most en-

lightened by reflection; who have forecast what they may have to endure, and prepared themselves accordingly. It is true even of these, when they are called into action, that they necessarily lose sight of their own accomplishments and support their conflicts in self-forgetfulness and humility. That species of happy ignorance, which is the consequence of these noble qualities, must exist still more frequently, and in a greater degree, in those persons to whom duty has never been matter of laborious speculation, and who have no intimations of the power to act and to resist which is in them, till they are summoned to put it forth. I could illustrate this by many examples, which are now before my eyes; but it would detain me too long from my principal subject which was to suggest reasons for believing that the encomiastic language of rural tomb-stones does not so far exceed reality as might lightly be supposed. Doubtless, an inattentive or ill-disposed Observer, who should apply to surrounding cottages the knowledge which he may possess of any rural neighbourhood, would upon the first impulse confidently report that there was little in their living inhabitants which reflected the concord and the virtue there dwelt upon so fondly. Much has been said in a former Paper tending to correct this disposition; and which will naturally combine with the present considerations. Besides, to slight the uniform language of these memorials as on that account not trustworthy would obviously be unjustifiable.

Enter a church-yard by the sea-coast, and you will be almost sure to find the tomb-stones crowded with metaphors taken from the sea and a sea-faring life. These are uniformly in the same strain; but surely we ought not thence to infer that the words are used of course, without any heartfelt sense of their pro-

priety. Would not the contrary conclusion be right? But I will adduce a fact which more than a hundred analogical arguments will carry to the mind a conviction of the strength and sanctity of those feelings which persons in humble stations of society connect with their departed friends and kindred. We learn from the Statistical Account of Scotland that in some districts a general transfer of inhabitants has taken place; and that a great majority of those who live, and labour, and attend public worship in one part of the country, are buried in another. Strong and unconquerable still continues to be the desire of all, that their bones should rest by the side of their forefathers, and very poor persons provide that their bodies should be conveyed if necessary to a great distance to obtain that last satisfaction. Nor can I refrain from saying that this natural interchange by which the living inhabitants of a parish have small knowledge of the dead who are buried in their churchyard is grievously to be lamented, wherever it exists. For it cannot fail to preclude not merely much but the best part of the wholesome influence of that communion between living and dead which the conjunction in rural districts of the place of burial and place of worship tends so effectually to promote. Finally, let us remember that if it be the nature of man to be insensible to vexations and afflictions when they have passed away, he is equally insensible to the height and depth of his blessings till they are removed from him. An experienced and well-regulated mind will not, therefore, be insensible to this monotonous language of sorrow and affectionate admiration; but will find under that veil a substance of individual truth. Yet upon all men, and upon such a mind in particular, an Epitaph must strike with a gleam of pleasure, when the expression is

of that kind which carries conviction to the heart at once that the author was a sincere mourner, and that the inhabitant of the grave deserved to be so lamented. This may be done sometimes by a naked ejaculation ; as in an instance which a friend of mine met with in a church-yard in Germany, thus literally translated : 'Ah ! they have laid in the grave a brave man : he was to me more than many !'

Ach ! sie haben
Einen Braven
Mann begraben
Mir war er mehr als viele.

An effect as pleasing is often produced by the recital of an affliction endured with fortitude, or of a privation submitted to with contentment ; or by a grateful display of the temporal blessings with which Providence had favoured the deceased, and the happy course of life through which he had passed. And where these individualities are untouched upon, it may still happen that the estate of man in his helplessness, in his dependence upon his Maker, or some other inherent of his nature shall be movingly and profitably expressed. Every Reader will be able to supply from his own observation instances of all these kinds, and it will be more pleasing for him to refer to his memory than to have the page crowded with unnecessary quotations. I will however give one or two from an old book cited before. The following, of general application, was a great favourite with our forefathers :

Farwel my Frendys, the tyd abidyth no man,
I am departed hens, and so sal ye,
But in this passage the best song I can
Is *Requiem Eternam*, now Jesu grant it me.

When I have ended all myn adversity
Grant me in Paradys to have a mansion
That shedst Thy bloud for my redemption.

This epitaph might seem to be of the age of Chaucer, for it has the very tone and manner of the *Prioress's Tale.*

The next opens with a thought somewhat interrupting that complacency and gracious repose which the language and imagery of a church-yard tend to diffuse, but the truth is weighty and will not be less acceptable for the rudeness of the expression.

When the bells be merrely roung
And the Masse devoutly soung
And the meate merrely eaten
Then sall Robert Trappis his Wyffs and his Chyldren be forgotten.
Wherfor Iesu that of Mary sproung
Set their soulys Thy Saynts among,
Though it be undeservyd on their syde
Yet good Lord let them evermor Thy mercy abyde!

It is well known how fond our ancestors were of a play upon the name of the deceased when it admitted of a double sense. The following is an instance of this propensity not idly indulged. It brings home a general truth to the individual by the medium of a pun, which will be readily pardoned for the sake of the image suggested by it, for the happy mood of mind in which the epitaph is composed, for the beauty of the language, and for the sweetness of the versification, which indeed, the date considered, is not a little curious. It is upon a man whose name was Palmer. I have modernized the spelling in order

that its uncouthness may not interrupt the Reader's gratification.

Palmers all our Fathers were
I a Palmer livèd here
And travelled still till worn with age
I ended this world's pilgrimage,
On the blest Ascension-day
In the chearful month of May;
One thousand with four hundred seven,
And took my journey hence to heaven.

With this join the following, which was formerly to be seen upon a fair marble under the portraiture of one of the abbots of St. Albans.

Hic quidem terra tegitur
Peccati solvens debitum
Cujus nomen non impositum
In libro vitae sit inscriptum.

The spirit of it may be thus given: 'Here lies, covered by the earth, and paying his debt to sin, one whose name is not set forth: may it be inscribed in the Book of Life!'

But these instances, of the humility, the pious faith and simplicity of our forefathers, have led me from the scene of our contemplations—a Country Church-yard! and from the memorials at this day commonly found in it. I began with noticing such as might be wholly uninteresting from the uniformity of the language which they exhibit; because, without previously participating the truths upon which these general attestations are founded, it is impossible to arrive at that state of disposition of mind necessary to make those epitaphs thoroughly felt which have an especial recommendation. With the same view, I will venture to say a few words upon another

characteristic of these compositions almost equally striking; namely, the homeliness of some of the inscriptions, the strangeness of the illustrative images, the grotesque spelling, with the equivocal meaning often struck out by it, and the quaint jingle of the rhymes. These have often excited regret in serious minds, and provoked the unwilling to good-humoured laughter. Yet, for my own part, without affecting any superior sanctity, I must say that I have been better satisfied with myself, when in these evidences I have seen a proof how deeply the piety of the rude forefathers of the hamlet is seated in their natures; I mean how habitual and constitutional it is, and how awful the feeling which they attach to the situation of their departed friends,—a proof of this rather than of their ignorance or of a deadness in their faculties to a sense of the ridiculous. And that this deduction may be just, is rendered probable by the frequent occurrence of passages according to our present notion, full as ludicrous, in the writings of the most wise and learned men of former ages, divines and poets, who in the earnestness of their souls have applied metaphors and illustrations, taken either from Holy Writ or from the usages of their own country, in entire confidence that the sacredness of the theme they were discussing would sanctify the meanest object connected with it; or rather without ever conceiving it was possible that a ludicrous thought could spring up in any mind engaged in such meditations. And certainly, these odd and fantastic combinations are not confined to epitaphs of the peasantry, or of the lower orders of society, but are perhaps still more commonly produced among the higher, in a degree equally or more striking. For instance, what shall we say to this upon Sir George Vane, the noted Secretary of State to King Charles I?

His Honour wonne i' th' field lies here in dust,
His Honour got by grace shall never rust:
The former fades, the latter shall fade never
For why? He was Sr George once but St George ever.

The date is 1679. When we reflect that the father of this personage must have had his taste formed in the punning Court of James I, and that the epitaph was composed at a time when our literature was stuffed with quaint or out-of-the-way thoughts, it will seem not unlikely that the author prided himself upon what he might call a clever hit: I mean his better affections were less occupied with the several associations belonging to the two ideas than his vanity delighted with that act of ingenuity by which they had been combined. But the first couplet consists of a just thought naturally expressed; and I should rather conclude the whole to be a work of honest simplicity; and that the sense of worldly dignity associated with the title, in a degree habitual to our ancestors, but which at this time we can but feebly sympathize with, and the imaginative feeling involved—viz. the saintly and chivalrous name of the champion of England, were unaffectedly linked together: and that both were untied and consolidated in the author's mind, and in the minds of his contemporaries whom no doubt he had pleased, by a devout contemplation of a happy immortality, the reward of the just.

At all events, leaving this particular case undecided, the general propriety of these notices cannot be doubted; and I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to place in a clear view the power and majesty of impassioned faith, whatever be its object: to shew how it subjugates the lighter motions of the mind,

and sweeps away superficial difference in things. And this I have done, not to lower the witling and the worldling in their own esteem, but with a wish to bring the ingenuous into still closer communion with those primary sensations of the human heart, which are the vital springs of sublime and pathetic composition, in this and in every other kind. And as from these primary sensations such composition speaks, so, unless correspondent ones listen promptly and submissively in the inner cell of the mind to whom it is addressed, the voice cannot be heard; its highest powers are wasted.

These suggestions may be further useful to establish a criterion of sincerity, by which a writer may be judged; and this is of high import. For, when a man is treating an interesting subject, or one which he ought not to treat at all unless he be interested, no faults have such a killing power as those which prove that he is not in earnest, that he is acting a part, has leisure for affectation, and feels that without it he could do nothing. This is one of the most odious of faults; because it shocks the moral sense, and is worse in a sepulchral inscription, precisely in the same degree as that mode of composition calls for sincerity more urgently than any other. And indeed where the internal evidence proves that the writer was moved, in other words where this charm of sincerity lurks in the language of a tomb-stone and secretly pervades it, there are no errors in style or manner for which it will not be, in some degree, a recompense; but without habits of reflection a test of this inward simplicity cannot be come at; and as I have said, I am now writing with a hope to assist the well-disposed to attain it.

Let us take an instance where no one can be at a loss. The following lines are said to have been

written by the illustrious Marquis of Montrose with the point of his sword, upon being informed of the death of his master, Charles I:

Great, good, and just, could I but rate
My griefs, and thy so rigid fate;
I'd weep the world to such a strain,
As it should deluge once again.
But since thy loud-tongued blood demands supplies,
More from Briareus' hands than Argus' eyes,
I'll sing thy obsequies with trumpets' sounds
And write thy epitaph with blood and wounds.

These funereal verses would certainly be wholly out of their place upon a tomb-stone; but who can doubt that the writer was transported to the height of the occasion? that he was moved as it became an heroic soldier, holding those principles and opinions, to be moved? His soul labours;—the most tremendous event in the history of the planet—namely, the deluge,—is brought before his imagination by the physical image of tears,—a connection awful from its very remoteness and from the slender band that unites the ideas:—it passes into the region of fable likewise; for all modes of existence that forward his purpose are to be pressed into the service. The whole is instinct with spirit, and every word has its separate life; like the chariot of the Messiah, and the wheels of that chariot, as they appeared to the imagination of Milton aided by that of the prophet Ezekiel. It had power to move of itself, but was conveyed by cherubs.

. . . with stars their bodies all
And wings were set with eyes, with eyes the wheels
Of beryl, and careering fires between.

Compare with the above verses of Montrose the fol-

lowing epitaph upon Sir Philip Sidney, which was formerly placed over his grave in St. Paul's Church:

> England, Netherland, the Heavens, and the Arts,
> The Soldiers, and the World, have made six parts
> Of noble Sidney; for who will suppose
> That a small heap of stones can Sidney enclose?
> England hath his Body, for she it fed,
> Netherland his Blood, in her defence shed:
> The Heavens have his Soul, the Arts have his Fame,
> The Soldiers the grief, the World his good Name.

There were many points in which the case of Sidney resembled that of Charles I. He was a sovereign, but of a nobler kind—a sovereign in the hearts of men; and after his premature death he was truly, as he hath been styled, 'the world-mourned Sidney.' So fondly did the admiration of his contemporaries settle upon him, that the sudden removal of a man so good, great, and thoroughly accomplished, wrought upon many even to repining, and to the questioning the dispensations of Providence. Yet he, whom Spenser and all the men of genius of his age had tenderly bemoaned, is thus commemorated upon his tomb-stone; and to add to the indignity, the memorial is nothing more than the second-hand coat of a French commander! It is a servile translation from a French epitaph, which says Weever, 'was by some English Wit happily imitated and ingeniously applied to the honour of our worthy chieftain.' Yet Weever in a foregoing paragraph thus expresses himself upon the same subject; giving without his own knowledge, in my opinion, an example of the manner in which an epitaph ought to have been composed: 'But I cannot pass over in silence Sir Philip Sidney, the elder brother, being (to use Camden's words) the glorious star of this family, a lively pattern of virtue,

and the lovely joy of all the learned sort; who fighting valiantly with the enemy before Zutphen in Geldesland, dyed manfully. This is that Sidney, whom, as God's will was, he should therefore be born into the world even to shew unto our age a sample of ancient virtues: so His good pleasure was, before any man looked for it, to call for him again and take him out of the world, as being more worthy of heaven than earth. Thus we may see perfect virtue suddenly vanisheth out of sight, and the best men continue not long.'

There can be no need to analyse this simple effusion of the moment in order to contrast it with the laboured composition before given; the difference will flash upon the Reader at once. But I may say it is not likely that such a frigid composition as the former would have ever been applied to a man whose death had so stirred up the hearts of his contemporaries, if it had not been felt that something different from that nature which each man carried in his own breast was in his case requisite; and that a certain straining of mind was inseparable from the subject. Accordingly, an epitaph is adopted in which the Writer had turned from the genuine affections and their self-forgetting inspirations, to the end that his understanding, or the faculty designated by the word *head* as opposed to *heart*, might curiously construct a fabric to be wondered at. Hyperbole in the language of Montrose is a mean instrument made mighty because wielded by an afflicted soul, and strangeness is here the order of Nature. Montrose stretched after remote things, but was at the same time propelled towards them; the French Writer goes deliberately in search of them: no wonder then if what he brings home does not prove worth the carriage.

Let us return to an instance of common life. I quote it with reluctance, not so much for its absurdity as that the expression in one place will strike at first sight as little less than impious; and it is indeed, though unintentionally so, most irreverent. But, I know no other example that will so forcibly illustrate the important truth I wish to establish. The following epitaph is to be found in a church-yard in Westmoreland; which the present Writer has reason to think of with interest as it contains the remains of some of his ancestors and kindred. The date is 1673.

Under this Stone, Reader, inter'd doth lye,
Beauty and Virtue's true epitomy.
At her appearance the noone-son
Blush'd and shrunk in 'cause quite outdon.
In her concentered did all graces dwell:
God pluck'd my rose that He might take a smel.
I'll say no more: but weeping wish I may
Soone with thy dear chaste ashes com to lay.
Sic efflevit Maritus.

Can anything go beyond this in extravagance? yet, if the fundamental thoughts be translated into a natural style, they will be found reasonable and affecting—'The woman who lies here interred, was in my eyes a perfect image of beauty and virtue; she was to me a brighter object than the sun in heaven: God took her, who was my delight, from this earth to bring her nearer to Himself. Nothing further is worthy to be said than that weeping I wish soon to lie by thy dear chaste ashes. Thus did the husband pour out his tears.'

These verses are preceded by a brief account of the lady, in Latin prose, in which the little that is said is the uncorrupted language of affection. But,

without this introductory communication I should myself have had no doubt, after recovering from the first shock of surprise and disapprobation, that this man, notwithstanding his extravagant expressions, was a sincere mourner; and that his heart, during the very act of composition, was moved. These fantastic images, though they stain the writing, stained not her soul,—they did not even touch it; but hung like globules of rain suspended above a green leaf, along which they may roll and leave no trace that they have passed over it. This simple-hearted man must have been betrayed by a common notion that what was natural in prose would be out of place in verse;—that it is not the Muse which puts on the garb but the garb which makes the Muse. And having adopted this notion at a time when vicious writings of this kind accorded with the public taste, it is probable that, in the excess of his modesty, the blankness of his inexperience, and the intensity of his affection, he thought that the further he wandered from Nature in his language the more would he honour his departed consort, who now appeared to him to have surpassed humanity in the excellence of her endowments. The quality of his fault and its very excess are both in favour of this conclusion.

Let us contrast this epitaph with one taken from a celebrated Writer of the last century.

To the memory of LUCY LYTTLETON, *Daughter &c. who departed this life &c. aged 20. Having employed the short time assigned to her here in the uniform practice of religion and virtue.*

Made to engage all hearts, and charm all eyes,
Though meek, magnanimous; though witty, wise;

Polite, as all her life in Courts had been;
Yet good, as she the world had never seen;
The noble fire of an exalted mind,
With gentle female tenderness combined.
Her speech was the melodious voice of love,
Her song the warbling of the vernal grove;
Her eloquence was sweeter than her song,
Soft as her heart, and as her reason strong;
Her form each beauty of the mind express'd,
Her mind was Virtue by the Graces drest.

The prose part of this inscription has the appearance of being intended for a tomb-stone; but there is nothing in the verse that would suggest such a thought. The composition is in the style of those laboured portraits in words which we sometimes see placed at the bottom of a print to fill up lines of expression which the bungling Artist had left imperfect. We know from other evidence that Lord Lyttleton dearly loved his wife; he has indeed composed a monody to her memory which proves this, and she was an amiable woman; neither of which facts could have been gathered from these inscriptive verses. This epitaph would derive little advantage from being translated into another style as the former was; for there is no under current; no skeleton or staminæ of thought and feeling. The Reader will perceive at once that nothing in the heart of the Writer had determined either the choice, the order or the expression, of the ideas; that there is no interchange of action from within and from without; that the connections are mechanical and arbitrary, and the lowest kind of these—heart and eyes: petty alliterations, as meek and magnanimous, witty and wise, combined with oppositions in thoughts where there is no necessary or natural opposition. Then

follow voice, song, eloquence, form, mind—each enumerated by a separate act as if the Author had been making a *Catalogue Raisonné.*

These defects run through the whole; the only tolerable verse is,

Her speech was the melodious voice of love.

Observe, the question is not which of these epitaphs is better or worse; but which faults are of a worse kind. In the former case we have a mourner whose soul is occupied by grief and urged forward by his admiration. He deems in his simplicity that no hyperbole can transcend the perfections of her whom he has lost; for the version which I have given fairly demonstrates that, in spite of his outrageous expressions, the under current of his thoughts was natural and pure. We have therefore in him the example of a mind during the act of composition misled by false taste to the highest possible degree; and, in that of Lord Lyttleton, we have one of a feeling heart, not merely misled, but wholly laid asleep by the same power. Lord Lyttleton could not have written in this way upon such a subject, if he had not been seduced by the example of Pope, whose sparkling and tuneful manner had bewitched the men of letters his contemporaries, and corrupted the judgment of the nation through all ranks of society. So that a great portion of original genius was necessary to embolden a man to write faithfully to Nature upon any affecting subject if it belonged to a class of composition in which Pope had furnished examples.

I am anxious not to be misunderstood. It has already been stated that in this species of composition above every other, our sensations and judgments depend upon our opinion or feeling of the Author's state of mind. Literature is here so far

identified with morals, the quality of the act so far determined by our notion of the aim and purpose of the agent, that nothing can please us, however well executed in its kind, if we are persuaded that the primary virtues of sincerity, earnestness and a moral interest in the main object are wanting. Insensibility here shocks us, and still more so if manifested by a Writer going wholly out of his way in search of supposed beauties, which if he were truly moved he could set no value upon, could not even think of. We are struck in this case not merely with a sense of disproportion and unfitness, but we cannot refrain from attributing no small part of his intellectual to a moral demerit. And here the difficulties of the question begin, namely in ascertaining what errors in the choice of or the mode of expressing the thoughts, most surely indicate the want of that which is most indispensable. Bad taste; whatever shape it may put on, is injurious to the heart and the understanding. If a man attaches much interest to the faculty of taste as it exists in himself and employs much time in those studies of which this faculty (I use the word taste in its comprehensive though most unjustifiable sense) is reckoned the arbiter, certain it is his moral notions and dispositions must either be purified and strengthened or corrupted and impaired. How can it be otherwise, when his ability to enter into the spirit of works in literature must depend upon his feelings, his imagination and his understanding, that is upon his recipient, upon his creative or active and upon his judging powers, and upon the accuracy and compass of his knowledge, in fine upon all that makes up the moral and intellectual man. What is true of individuals is equally true of nations. Nevertheless a man called to a task in which he is not practised, may have his expression thoroughly

defiled and clogged by the style prevalent in his age, yet still, through the force of circumstances that have roused him, his under feeling may remain strong and pure; yet this may be wholly concealed from common view. Indeed the favourite style of different ages is so different and wanders so far from propriety that if it were not that first rate Writers in all nations and tongues are governed by common principles, we might suppose that truth and nature were things not to be looked for in books; hence to an unpractised Reader the productions of every age will present obstacles in various degrees hard to surmount; a deformity of style not the worst in itself but of that kind with which he is least familiar will on the one hand be most likely to render him insensible to a pith and power which may be within, and on the other hand he will be the least able to see through that sort of falsehood which is most prevalent in the works of his own time. Many of my Readers, to apply these general observations to the present case, must have derived pleasure from the epitaph of Lord Lyttleton and no doubt will be startled at the comparison I have made; but bring it to the test recommended it will then be found that its faults, though not in degree so intolerable, are in kind more radical and deadly than those of the strange composition with which it has been compared.

The course which we have taken having brought us to the name of this distinguished Writer—Pope—I will in this place give a few observations upon his Epitaphs,—the largest collection we have in our language, from the pen of any Writer of eminence. As the epitaphs of Pope and also those of Chiabrera, which occasioned this dissertation, are in metre, it may be proper here to enquire how far the notion of a perfect epitaph, as given in a former Paper,

may be modified by the choice of metre for the vehicle, in preference to prose. If our opinions be just, it is manifest that the basis must remain the same in either case; and that the difference can only lie in the superstructure; and it is equally plain, that a judicious man will be less disposed in this case than in any other to avail himself of the liberty given by metre to adopt phrases of fancy, or to enter into the more remote regions of illustrative imagery. For the occasion of writing an epitaph is matter-of-fact in its intensity, and forbids more authoritatively than any other species of composition all modes of fiction, except those which the very strength of passion has created; which have been acknowledged by the human heart, and have become so familiar that they are converted into substantial realities. When I come to the epitaphs of Chiabrera, I shall perhaps give instances in which I think he has not written under the impression of this truth; where the poetic imagery does not elevate, deepen, or refine the human passion, which it ought always to do or not to act at all, but excludes it. In a far greater degree are Pope's epitaphs debased by faults into which he could not I think have fallen if he had written in prose as a plain man and not as a metrical Wit. I will transcribe from Pope's Epitaphs the one upon Mrs. Corbet (who died of a cancer), Dr. Johnson having extolled it highly and pronounced it the best of the collection.

Here rests a woman, good without pretence,
Blest with plain reason and with sober sense;
No conquest she but o'er herself desir'd;
No arts essayed, but not to be admir'd.
Passion and pride were to her soul unknown,
Convinc'd that virtue only is our own.

So unaffected, so compos'd a mind,
So firm yet soft, so strong yet so refin'd,
Heaven as its purest gold by tortures tried,
The saint sustain'd it, but the woman died.

This *may* be the best of Pope's Epitaphs; but if the standard which we have fixed be a just one, it cannot be approved of. First, it must be observed, that in the epitaphs of this Writer, the true impulse is wanting, and that his motions must of necessity be feeble. For he has no other aim than to give a favourable portrait of the character of the deceased. Now mark the process by which this is performed. Nothing is represented implicitly, that is, with its accompaniment of circumstances, or conveyed by its effects. The Author forgets that it is a living creature that must interest us and not an intellectual existence, which a mere character is. Insensible to this distinction the brain of the Writer is set at work to report as flatteringly as he may of the mind of his subject; the good qualities are separately abstracted (can it be otherwise than coldly and unfeelingly?) and put together again as coldly and unfeelingly. The epitaph now before us owes what exemption it may have from these defects in its general plan to the excruciating disease of which the lady died; but it is liable to the same censure, and is, like the rest, further objectionable in this; namely, that the thoughts have their nature changed and moulded by the vicious expression in which they are entangled, to an excess rendering them wholly unfit for the place they occupy.

Here rests a woman, good without pretence,
Blest with plain reason—

from which *sober sense* is not sufficiently distinguishable. This verse and a half, and the one 'so un-

affected, so composed a mind,' are characteristic, and the expression is true to nature; but they are, if I may take the liberty of saying it, the only parts of the epitaph which have this merit. Minute criticism is in its nature irksome, and as commonly practised in books and conversation, is both irksome and injurious. Yet every mind must occasionally be exercised in this discipline, else it cannot learn the art of bringing words rigorously to the test of thoughts; and these again to a comparison with things, their archetypes, contemplated first in themselves, and secondly in relation to each other; in all which processes the mind must be skilful, otherwise it will be perpetually imposed upon. In the next couplet the word *conquest* is applied in a manner that would have been displeasing even from its triteness in a copy of complimentary verses to a fashionable Beauty; but to talk of making conquests in an epitaph is not to be endured. 'No arts essayed, but not to be admired,'—are words expressing that she had recourse to artifices to conceal her amiable and admirable qualities; and the context implies that there was a merit in this; which surely no sane mind would allow. But the meaning of the Author, simply and honestly given, was nothing more than that she shunned admiration, probably with a more apprehensive modesty than was common; and more than this would have been inconsistent with the praise bestowed upon her—that she had an unaffected mind. This couplet is further objectionable, because the sense of love and peaceful admiration which such a character naturally inspires, is disturbed by an oblique and ill-timed stroke of satire. She is not praised so much as others are blamed, and is degraded by the Author in thus being made a covert or stalking-horse for gratifying a propensity the most

abhorrent from her own nature—'Passion and pride were to her soul unknown.' It cannot be meant that she had no passions, but that they were moderate and kept in subordination to her reason; but the thought is not here expressed; nor is it clear that a conviction in the understanding that 'virtue only is our own', though it might suppress her pride, would be itself competent to govern or abate many other affections and passions to which our frail nature is, and ought in various degrees, to be subject. In fact, the Author appears to have had no precise notion of his own meaning. If she was 'good without pretence', it seems unnecessary to say that she was not proud. Dr. Johnson, making an exception of the verse, 'Convinced that virtue only is our own,' praises this epitaph for 'containing nothing taken from common places'. Now in fact, as may be deduced from the principles of this discourse, it is not only no fault but a primary requisite in an epitaph that it shall contain thoughts and feelings which are in their substance common-place, and even trite. It is grounded upon the universal intellectual property of man,—sensations which all men have felt and feel in some degree daily and hourly;—truths whose very interest and importance have caused them to be unattended to, as things which could take care of themselves. But it is required that these truths should be instinctively ejaculated or should rise irresistibly from circumstances; in a word that they should be uttered in such connection as shall make it felt that they are not adopted, not spoken by rote, but perceived in their whole compass with the freshness and clearness of an original intuition. The Writer must introduce the truth with such accompaniment as shall imply that he has mounted to the sources of things, penetrated the dark cavern from which the

river that murmurs in every one's ear has flowed from generation to generation. The line 'Virtue only is our own,'—is objectionable, not from the commonplaceness of the truth, but from the vapid manner in which it is conveyed. A similar sentiment is expressed with appropriate dignity in an epitaph by Chiabrera, where he makes the Archbishop of Albino say of himself, that he was

> . . . smitten by the great ones of the world,
> But did not fall; for virtue braves all shocks,
> Upon herself resting immoveably.

'So firm yet soft, so strong yet so refined': These intellectual operations (while they can be conceived of as operations of intellect at all, for in fact one half of the process is mechanical, words doing their own work and one half of the line manufacturing the rest) remind me of the motions of a Posture-master, or of a man balancing a sword upon his finger, which must be kept from falling at all hazards. 'The saint sustained it, but the woman died.' Let us look steadily at this antithesis: the *saint*, that is her soul strengthened by religion, supported the anguish of her disease with patience and resignation; but the *woman*, that is her body (for if anything else is meant by the word woman, it contradicts the former part of the proposition and the passage is nonsense), was overcome. Why was not this simply expressed; without playing with the Reader's fancy, to the delusion and dishonour of his understanding, by a trifling epigrammatic point? But alas! ages must pass away before men will have their eyes open to the beauty and majesty of Truth, and will be taught to venerate Poetry no further than as she is a handmaid pure as her mistress—the noblest handmaid in her train!

UPON EPITAPHS (3)

I VINDICATE the rights and dignity of Nature; and as long as I condemn nothing without assigning reasons not lightly given, I cannot suffer any individual, however highly and deservedly honoured by my countrymen, to stand in my way. If my notions are right, the epitaphs of Pope cannot well be too severely condemned; for not only are they almost wholly destitute of those universal feelings and simple movements of mind which we have called for as indispensible, but they are little better than a tissue of false thoughts, languid and vague expressions, unmeaning antithesis, and laborious attempts at discrimination. Pope's mind had been employed chiefly in observation upon the vices and follies of men. Now, vice and folly are in contradiction with the moral principle which can never be extinguished in the mind; and therefore, wanting the contrast, are irregular, capricious, and inconsistent with themselves. If a man has once said (see *Friend*), 'Evil, be thou my good!' and has acted accordingly, however strenuous may have been his adherence to this principle, it will be well known by those who have had an opportunity of observing him narrowly that there have been perpetual obliquities in his course; evil passions thwarting each other in various ways; and now and then, revivals of his better nature, which check him for a short time or lead him to remeasure his steps:—not to speak of the various necessities of counterfeiting virtue, which the furtherance of his schemes will impose upon him, and the division which will be consequently introduced into his nature.

It is reasonable then that Cicero, when holding up Catiline to detestation; and (without going to

such an extreme case) that Dryden and Pope, when they are describing characters like Buckingham, Shaftsbury, and the Duchess of Marlborough, should represent qualities and actions at war with each other and with themselves; and that the page should be suitably crowded with antithetical expressions. But all this argues an obtuse moral sensibility and a consequent want of knowledge, if applied where virtue ought to be described in the language of affectionate admiration. In the mind of the truly great and good everything that is of importance is at peace with itself; all is stillness, sweetness and stable grandeur. Accordingly the contemplation of virtue is attended with repose. A lovely quality, if its loveliness be clearly perceived, fastens the mind with absolute sovereignty upon itself; permitting or inciting it to pass, by smooth gradation or gentle transition, to some other kindred quality. Thus a perfect image of meekness (I refer to an instance before given) when looked at by a tender mind in its happiest mood, might easily lead on to thoughts of magnanimity; for assuredly there is nothing incongruous in those virtues. But the mind would not then be separated from the person who is the object of its thoughts; it would still be confined to that person or to others of the same general character; that is, would be kept within the circle of qualities which range themselves quietly by each other's sides. Whereas, when meekness and magnanimity are represented antithetically, the mind is not only carried from the main object, but is compelled to turn to a subject in which the quality exists divided from some other as noble, its natural ally: a painful feeling! that checks the course of love, and repels the sweet thoughts that might be settling round the person whom it was the Author's wish to endear to

us; but for whom, after this interruption, we no longer care. If then a man, whose duty it is to praise departed excellence not without some sense of regret or sadness, to do this or to be silent, should upon all occasions exhibit that mode of connecting thoughts, which is only natural while we are delineating vice under certain relations, we may be assured that the nobler sympathies are not alive in him; that he has no clear insight into the internal constitution of virtue; nor has himself been soothed, cheared, harmonized, by those outward effects which follow everywhere her goings,—declaring the presence of the invisible Deity. And though it be true that the most admirable of them must fall far short of perfection, and that the majority of those whose work is commemorated upon their tomb-stones must have been persons in whom good and evil were intermixed in various proportions and stood in various degrees of opposition to each other, yet the Reader will remember what has been said before upon that medium of love, sorrow and admiration, through which a departed friend is viewed; how it softens down or removes these harshnesses and contradictions, which moreover must be supposed never to have been grievous: for there can be no true love but between the good; and no epitaph ought to be written upon a bad man, except for a warning.

The purpose of the remarks given in the last Essay was chiefly to assist the Reader in separating truth and sincerity from falsehood and affectation; presuming that if the unction of a devout heart be wanting everything else is of no avail. It was shewn that a current of just thought and feeling may flow under a surface of illustrative imagery so impure as to produce an effect the opposite of that which was intended. Yet, though this fault may be carried to

an intolerable *degree*, the Reader will have gathered that in our estimation it is not *in kind* the most offensive and injurious. We have contrasted it in its excess with instances where the genuine current or vein was wholly wanting; where the thoughts and feelings had no vital union, but were artificially connected, or formally accumulated, in a manner that would imply discontinuity and feebleness of mind upon any occasion, but still more reprehensible here!

I will proceed to give milder examples not in this last kind but in the former; namely of failure from various causes where the ground-work is good.

Take holy earth! all that my soul holds dear:
Take that best gift which Heaven so lately gave:
To Bristol's fount I bore with trembling care,
Her faded form. She bow'd to taste the wave—
And died. Does youth, does beauty read the line?
Does sympathetic fear their breasts alarm?
Speak, dead Maria! breathe a strain divine;
Even from the grave thou shalt have power to charm.
Bid them in duty's sphere as meekly move:
And if so fair, from vanity as free,
As firm in friendship, and as fond in love;
Tell them, tho' 'tis an awful thing to die,
('Twas e'en to thee) yet, the dread path once trod;
Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids 'the pure in heart behold their God'.

This epitaph has much of what we have demanded; but it is debased in some instances by weakness of expression, in others by false prettiness. 'She bow'd to taste the wave, and died.' The plain truth was, she drank the Bristol waters which failed to restore her, and her death soon followed; but the expression involves a multitude of petty occupations for the

fancy. 'She bow'd': was there any truth in this? 'to taste the wave': the water of a mineral spring which must have been drunk out of a goblet. Strange application of the word 'wave' and 'died': This would have been a just expression if the water had killed her; but, as it is, the tender thought involved in the disappointment of a hope however faint is left unexpressed; and a shock of surprise is given, entertaining perhaps to a light fancy but to a steady mind unsatisfactory, because false. 'Speak! dead Maria, breathe a strain divine'! This sense flows nobly from the heart and the imagination; but perhaps it is not one of those impassioned thoughts which should be fixed in language upon a sepulchral stone. It is in its nature too poignant and transitory. A husband meditating by his wife's grave would throw off such a feeling and would give voice to it; and it would be in its place in a Monody to her memory; but if I am not mistaken, ought to have been suppressed here, or uttered after a different manner. The implied impersonation of the deceased (according to the tenor of what has before been said) ought to have been more general and shadowy.

> And if so fair, from vanity as free,
> As firm in friendship and as fond in love;
> Tell them——

These are two sweet verses, but the word 'fair' is improper; for unquestionably it was not intended that their title to receive this assurance should depend at all upon their personal beauty. Moreover in this couplet and in what follows, the long suspension of the sense excites the expectation of a thought less common than the concluding one; and is an instance of a failure in doing what is most needful and most difficult in an epitaph to do; namely

to give to universally received truths a pathos and spirit which shall re-admit them into the soul like revelations of the moment.

I have said that this excellence is difficult to attain; and why? Is it because nature is weak? No! Where the soul has been thoroughly stricken (and Heaven knows the course of life must have placed all men, at some time or other, in that condition) there is never a want of *positive* strength; but because the adversary of Nature (call that adversary Art or by what name you will) is *comparatively* strong. The far-searching influence of the power, which, for want of a better name, we will denominate Taste, is in nothing more evinced than in the changeful character and complexion of that species of composition which we have been reviewing. Upon a call so urgent, it might be expected that the affections, the memory, and the imagination would be *constrained* to speak their genuine language. Yet, if the few specimens which have been given in the course of this enquiry, do not demonstrate the fact, the Reader need only look into any collection of Epitaphs to be convinced, that the faults predominant in the literature of every age will be as strongly reflected in the sepulchral inscriptions as any where; nay perhaps more so, from the anxiety of the Author to do justice to the occasion: and especially if the composition be in verse; for then it comes more avowedly in the shape of a work of art; and of course, is more likely to be coloured by the work of art holden in most esteem at the time. In a bulky volume of Poetry entitled *Elegant Extracts in Verse*, which must be known to most of my Readers, as it is circulated everywhere and in fact constitutes at this day the poetical library of our Schools, I find a number of epitaphs in verse, of the last century; and there is

scarcely one which is not thoroughly tainted by the artifices which have over-run our writings in metre since the days of Dryden and Pope. Energy, stillness, grandeur, tenderness, those feelings which are the pure emanations of Nature, those thoughts which have the infinitude of truth, and those expressions which are not what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part and power or function in the thought—all these are abandoned for their opposites,—as if our countrymen, through successive generations, had lost the sense of solemnity and pensiveness (not to speak of deeper emotions) and resorted to the tombs of their forefathers and contemporaries, only to be tickled and surprised. Would we not recoil from such gratification, in such a place, if the general literature of the country had not co-operated with other causes insidiously to weaken our sensibilities and deprave our judgments? Doubtless, there are shocks of event and circumstance, public and private, by which for all minds the truths of Nature will be elicited; but sorrow for that individual or people to whom these special interferences are necessary, to bring them into communion with the inner spirit of things! for such intercourse must be profitless in proportion as it is unfrequently irregular and transient. Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil, to be trifled with; they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If words be not (recurring to a metaphor before used) an incarnation of the thought, but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such a one as those possessed vestments, read of in the stories of superstitious times, which had power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on. Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave

in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve. From a deep conviction then that the excellence of writing, whether in prose or verse, consists in a conjunction of Reason and Passion, a conjunction which must be of necessity benign; and that it might be deduced from what has been said that the taste, intellectual power and morals of a country are inseparably linked in mutual dependence, I have dwelt thus long upon this argument. And the occasion justifies me; for how could the tyranny of bad taste be brought home to the mind more aptly than by showing in what degree the feelings of nature yield to it when we are rendering to our friends the solemn testimony of our love? more forcibly than by giving proof that thoughts cannot, even upon this impulse, assume an outward life without a transmutation and a fall.

Epitaph on Miss Drummond in the Church of Broadsworth, Yorkshire.

MASON.

Here sleeps what once was beauty, once was grace;
Grace, that with tenderness and sense combin'd
To form that harmony of soul and face,
Where beauty shines, the mirror of the mind.
Such was the maid, that in the morn of youth,
In virgin innocence, in Nature's pride,
Blest with each art, that owes its charm to truth,
Sunk in her Father's fond embrace, and died.
He weeps: O venerate the holy tear!
Faith lends her aid to ease Affliction's load;
The parent mourns his child upon the bier,
The Christian yields an angel to his God.

The following is a translation from the Latin, communicated to a Lady in her childhood and by her preserved in memory. I regret that I have not seen the original.

She is gone—my beloved daughter Eliza is gone,
Fair, cheerful, benign, my child is gone.
Thee long to be regretted a Father mourns,
Regretted—but thanks to the most perfect God!
not lost.
For a happier age approaches
When again, my child, I shall behold
And live with thee for ever.

Matthew Dobson to his dear, engaging, happy Eliza
Who in the 18th year of her age
Passed peaceably into heaven.

The former of these epitaphs is very far from being the worst of its kind, and on that account I have placed the two in contrast. Unquestionably, as the Father in the latter speaks in his own person, the situation is much more pathetic; but, making due allowance for this advantage, who does not here feel a superior truth and sanctity, which is not dependent upon this circumstance but merely the result of the expression and the connection of the thoughts? I am not so fortunate as to have any knowledge of the Author of this affecting composition, but I much fear if he had called in the assistance of English verse the better to convey his thoughts, such sacrifices would, from various influences, have been made *even by him*, that, though he might have excited admiration in thousands, he would have truly moved no one. The latter part of the following by Gray is almost the only instance among the metrical epitaphs in our language of the last century, which I remember, of affecting

thoughts rising naturally and keeping themselves pure from vicious diction; and therefore retaining their appropriate power over the mind.

Epitaph on Mrs. Clark.

Lo! where the silent marble weeps,
A friend, a wife, a mother, sleeps;
A heart, within whose sacred cell
The peaceful virtues lov'd to dwell.
Affection warm, and love sincere,
And soft humanity were there.
In agony, in death resigned,
She felt the wound she left behind.
Her infant image, here below,
Sits smiling on a father's woe;
Whom what awaits, while yet he strays
Along the lonely vale of days?
A pang to secret sorrow dear;
A sigh, an unavailing tear,
Till time shall every grief remove,
With life, with meaning, and with love.

I have been speaking of faults which are aggravated by temptations thrown in the way of modern Writers when they compose in metre. The first six lines of this epitaph are vague and languid, more so than I think would have been possible had it been written in prose. Yet Gray, who was so happy in the remaining part, especially the last four lines, has grievously failed *in prose* upon a subject which it might have been expected would have bound him indissolubly to the propriety of Nature and comprehensive reason. I allude to the conclusion of the epitaph upon his mother, where he says, 'she was the careful tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her.' This is a searching

thought, but wholly out of place. Had it been said of an idiot, of a palsied child, or of an adult from any cause dependent upon his mother to a degree of helplessness which nothing but maternal tenderness and watchfulness could answer, that he had the misfortune to survive his mother, the thought would have been just. The same might also have been wrung from any man (thinking of himself) when his soul was smitten with compunction or remorse, through the consciousness of a misdeed from which he might have been preserved (as he hopes or believes) by his mother's prudence, by her anxious care if longer continued, or by the reverential fear of offending or disobeying her. But even then (unless accompanied with a detail of extraordinary circumstances), if transferred to her monument, it would have been misplaced, as being too peculiar, and for reasons which have been before alleged, namely, as too transitory and poignant. But in an ordinary case, for a man permanently and conspicuously to record that this was his fixed feeling; what is it but to run counter to the course of nature, which has made it matter of expectation and congratulation that parents should die before their children? What is it, if searched to the bottom, but lurking and sickly selfishness? Does not the regret include a wish that the mother should have survived all her offspring, have witnessed that bitter desolation where the order of things is disturbed and inverted? And finally, does it not withdraw the attention of the Reader from the subject to the Author of the Memorial, as one to be commiserated for his strangely unhappy condition, or to be condemned for the morbid constitution of his feelings, or for his deficiency in judgment? A fault of the same kind, though less in degree, is found in the epitaph of Pope upon Harcourt; of whom it is said that 'he never gave

his father grief but when he died'. I need not point out how many situations there are in which such an expression of feeling would be natural and becoming; but in a permanent inscription things only should be admitted that have an enduring place in the mind; and a nice selection is required even among these. The Duke of Ormond said of his son Ossory, 'that he preferred his dead son to any living son in Christendom,'—a thought which (to adopt an expression used before) has the infinitude of truth! But though in this there is no momentary illusion, nothing fugitive, it would still have been unbecoming, had it been placed in open view over the son's grave; inasmuch as such expression of it would have had an ostentatious air, and would have implied a disparagement of others. The sublimity of the sentiment consists in its being the secret possession of the Father.

Having been engaged so long in the ungracious office of sitting in judgment where I have found so much more to censure than to approve, though, wherever it was in my power, I have placed good by the side of evil, that the Reader might intuitively receive the truths which I wished to communicate, I now turn back with pleasure to Chiabrera; of whose productions in this department the Reader of *The Friend* may be enabled to form a judgment who has attentively perused the few specimens only which have been given. 'An epitaph', says Weever, 'is a superscription (either in verse or prose) or an astrict pithic diagram, writ, carved, or engraven upon the tomb, grave, or sepulchre of the defunct, briefly declaring (*and that with a kind of commiseration*) the name, the age, the deserts, the dignities, the state, *the praises both of body and minde*, the good and bad fortunes in the life, and the manner and time of the death of the person therein interred.' This account

of an epitaph, which as far as it goes is just, was no doubt taken by Weever from the monuments of our own country, and it shews that in his conception an epitaph was not to be an abstract character of the deceased but an epitomized biography blended with description by which an impression of the character was to be conveyed. Bring forward the one incidental expression, a kind of commiseration, unite with it a concern on the part of the dead for the well-being of the living made known by exhortation and admonition, and let this commiseration and concern pervade and brood over the whole, so that what was peculiar to the individual shall still be subordinate to a sense of what he had in common with the species, our notion of a perfect epitaph would then be realized; and it pleases me to say that this is the very model upon which those of Chiabrera are for the most part framed. Observe how exquisitely this is exemplified in the one beginning 'Pause, courteous stranger! Balbi supplicates,' given in *The Friend* some weeks ago. The subject of the epitaph is introduced intreating, not directly in his own person but through the mouth of the author, that according to the religious belief of his country a prayer for his soul might be preferred to the Redeemer of the world: placed in counterpoise with this right which he has in common with all the dead, his individual earthly accomplishments appear light to his funeral Biographer as they did to the person of whom he speaks when alive, nor could Chiabrera have ventured to touch upon them but under the sanction of this person's acknowledgment. He then goes on to say how various and profound was his learning, and how deep a hold it took upon his affections, but that he weaned himself from these things as vanities, and was devoted in later life exclusively to the divine truths

of the Gospel as the only knowledge in which he could find perfect rest. Here we are thrown back upon the introductory supplication and made to feel its especial propriety in this case; his life was long, and every part of it bore appropriate fruits. Urbina his birth-place might be proud of him, and the passenger who was entreated to pray for his soul has a wish breathed for his welfare. This composition is a perfect whole, there is nothing arbitrary or mechanical, but it is an organized body, of which the members are bound together by a common life and are all justly proportioned. If I had not gone so much into detail I should have given further instances of Chiabrera's Epitaphs, but I must content myself with saying that if he had abstained from the introduction of heathen mythology, of which he is lavish—an inexcusable fault for an inhabitant of a Christian country, yet admitting of some palliation in an Italian who treads classic soil and has before his eyes the ruins of the temples which were dedicated to those fictitious beings of objects of worship by the majestic people his ancestors—had omitted also some uncharacteristic particulars, and had not on some occasions forgotten that truth is the soul of passion, he would have left his Readers little to regret. I do not mean to say that higher and nobler thoughts may not be found in sepulchral inscriptions than his contain; but he understood his work, the principles upon which he composed are just. The Reader of *The Friend* has had proofs of this: one shall be given of his mixed manner, exemplifying some of the points in which he has erred.

O Lelius beauteous flower of gentleness,
The fair Aglaia's friend above all friends:
O darling of the fascinating Loves

By what dire envy moved did Death uproot
Thy days ere yet full blown, and what ill chance
Hath robbed Savona of her noblest grace?
She weeps for thee and shall for ever weep,
And if the fountain of her tears should fail
She would implore Sabete to supply
Her need: Sabete, sympathizing stream,
Who on his margin saw thee close thine eyes
On the chaste bosom of thy Lady dear,
Ah, what do riches, what does youth avail?
Dust are our hopes, I weeping did inscribe
In bitterness thy monument, and pray
Of every gentle spirit bitterly
To read the record with as copious tears.

This epitaph is not without some tender thoughts, but a comparison of it with the one upon the youthful Pozzobonelli (see *Friend*), will more clearly shew that Chiabrera has here neglected to ascertain whether the passions expressed were in kind and degree a dispensation of reason, or at least commodities issued under her licence and authority.

The epitaphs of Chiabrera are twenty-nine in number, all of them save two probably little known at this day in their own country and scarcely at all beyond the limits of it; and the Reader is generally made acquainted with the moral and intellectual excellence which distinguished them by a brief history of the course of their lives or a selection of events and circumstances, and thus they are individualized; but in the two other instances, namely those of Tasso and Raphael, he enters into no particulars, but contents himself with four lines expressing one sentiment upon the principle laid down in the former part of this discourse, where the subject of an epitaph is a man of prime note.

Torquato Tasso rests within this tomb:
This figure weeping from her inmost heart
Is Poesy: from such impassioned grief
Let every one conclude what this man was.

The epitaph which Chiabrera composed for himself has also an appropriate brevity and is distinguished for its grandeur, the sentiment being the same as that which the Reader has before seen so happily enlarged upon.

As I am brought back to men of first rate distinction and public benefactors, I cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing the metrical part of an epitaph which formerly was inscribed in the church of St. Paul's to that Bishop of London who prevailed with William the Conqueror to secure to the inhabitants of the city all the liberties and privileges which they had enjoyed in the time of Edward the Confessor.

These marble monuments to thee thy citizens assigne,
Rewards (O Father) farre unfit to those deserts of thine:
Thee unto them a faithful friend, thy London people found,
And to this towne of no small weight, a stay both sure and sound.
Their liberties restorde to them, by means of thee have beene,
Their publicke weale by means of thee, large gifts have felt and seene:
Thy riches, stocke, and beauty brave, one hour hath them suppresst,
Yet these thy virtues and good deeds with us for ever rest.

Thus have I attempted to determine what a sepulchral inscription ought to be, and taken at the same

time a survey of what epitaphs are good and bad, and have shewn to what deficiencies in sensibility and to what errors in taste any judgment most commonly are to be ascribed. It was my intention to have given a few specimens from those of the ancients; but I have already I fear taken up too much of the Reader's time. I have not animadverted upon such, alas! far too numerous, as are reprehensible from the want of moral rectitude in those who have composed them or given it to be understood that they should be so composed; boastful and haughty panegyrics ludicrously contradicting the solid remembrance of those who knew the deceased; shocking the common sense of mankind by their extravagance, and affronting the very altar with their impious falsehood. Those I leave to general scorn, not however without a general recommendation that they who have offended or may be disposed to offend in this manner, would take into serious thought the heinousness of their transgression.

Upon reviewing what has been written I think it better here to add a few favourable specimens such as are ordinarily found in our country church-yards at this day. If those primary sensations upon which I have dwelt so much be not stifled in the heart of the Reader, they will be read with pleasure, otherwise neither these nor more exalted strains can by him be truly interpreted.

Aged 87 *and* 83.

Not more with silver hairs than virtue crown'd
The good old pair take up this spot of ground:
Tread in their steps and you will surely find
Their Rest above, below their peace of mind.

At the Last Day I'm sure I shall appear,
To meet with Jesus Christ my Saviour dear.
Where I do hope to live with Him in bliss.
Oh, what a joy at my last hour was this!

Aged 3 Months.

What Christ said once He said to all,
Come unto Me, ye children small:
None shall do you any wrong,
For to My Kingdom you belong.

Aged 10 Weeks.

The Babe was sucking at the breast
When God did call him to his rest.

In an obscure corner of a country church-yard I once espied, half overgrown with hemlock and nettles, a very small stone laid upon the ground, bearing nothing more than the name of the deceased with the date of birth and death, importing that it was an infant which had been born one day and died the following. I know not how far the Reader may be in sympathy with me; but more awful thoughts of rights conferred, of hopes awakened, of remembrances stealing away or vanishing, were imparted to my mind by that inscription there before my eyes than by any other that it has ever been my lot to meet with upon a tomb-stone.

The most numerous class of sepulchral inscriptions do indeed record nothing else but the name of the buried person; but that he was born upon one day and died upon another. Addison in the *Spectator* making this observation says, 'that he cannot look upon those registers of existence, whether of brass or marble, but as a kind of satire upon the departed

persons who had left no other memorial of them than that they were born and that they died.' In certain moods of mind this is a natural reflection; yet not perhaps the most salutary which the appearance might give birth to. As in these registers the name is mostly associated with others of the same family, this is a prolonged companionship, however shadowy: even a tomb like this is a shrine to which the fancies of a scattered family may return in pilgrimage; the thoughts of the individuals without any communication with each other must oftentimes meet here. Such a frail memorial then is not without its tendency to keep families together. It feeds also local attachment, which is the tap-root of the tree of Patriotism.

I know not how I can withdraw more satisfactorily from this long disquisition than by offering to the Reader as a farewell memorial the following Verses, suggested to me by a concise epitaph which I met with some time ago in one of the most retired vales among the mountains of Westmoreland. There is nothing in the detail of the poem which is not either founded upon the epitaph or gathered from enquiries concerning the deceased, made in the neighbourhood.

Beneath that pine which rears its dusky head
Aloft, and covered by a plain blue stone
Briefly inscribed, a gentle Dalesman lies;
From whom in early childhood was withdrawn
The precious gift of hearing. He grew up
From year to year in loneliness of soul;
And this deep mountain valley was to him
Soundless with all its streams. The bird of dawn
Did never rouse this Cottager from sleep
With startling summons; not for his delight
The vernal cuckoo shouted, not for him
Murmured the labouring bee. When stormy winds

Were working the broad bosom of the Lake
Into a thousand thousand sparkling waves,
Rocking the trees, or driving cloud on cloud
Along the sharp edge of yon lofty crags,
The agitated scene before his eye
Was silent as a picture; evermore
Were all things silent wheresoe'er he moved.
Yet by the solace of his own calm thoughts
Upheld, he duteously pursued the round
Of rural labours: the steep mountain side
Ascended with his staff and faithful dog;
The plough he guided and the scythe he swayed,
And the ripe corn before his sickle fell
Among the jocund reapers. For himself,
All watchful and industrious as he was,
He wrought not; neither field nor flock he owned;
No wish for wealth had place within his mind,
No husband's love nor father's hope or care;
Though born a younger brother, need was none
That from the floor of his paternal home
He should depart to plant himself anew;
And when mature in manhood he beheld
His parents laid in earth, no less ensued
Of rights to him, but he remained well pleased
By the pure bond of independent love,
An inmate of a second family,
The fellow-labourer and friend of him
To whom the small inheritance had fallen.
Nor deem that his mild presence was a weight
That pressed upon his brother's house; for books
Were ready comrades whom he could not tire;
Of whose society the blameless man
Was never satiate; their familiar voice
Even to old age with unabated charm
Beguiled his leisure hours, refreshed his thoughts,
Beyond its natural elevation raised

His introverted spirit, and bestowed
Upon his life an outward dignity
Which all acknowledged. The dark winter night,
The stormy day had each its own resource;
Song of the Muses, sage historic tale,
Science severe, or word of Holy Writ
Announcing immortality and joy
To the assembled spirits of the just
From imperfection and decay secure:
Thus soothed at home, thus busy in the field,
To no perverse suspicion he gave way;
No languor, peevishness, nor vain complaint.
And they who were about him did not fail
In reverence or in courtesy; they prized
His gentle manners, and his peaceful smiles;
The gleams of his slow-varying countenance
Were met with answering sympathy and love.
At length when sixty years and five were told
A slow disease insensibly consumed
The powers of nature, and a few short steps
Of friends and kindred bore him from his home,
Yon cottage shaded by the woody cross,
To the profounder stillness of the grave.
Nor was his funeral denied the grace
Of many tears, virtuous and thoughtful grief,
Heart-sorrow rendered sweet by gratitude;
And now that monumental stone preserves
His name, and unambitiously relates
How long and by what kindly outward aids
And in what pure contentedness of mind
The sad privation was by him endured.
And yon tall pine-tree, whose composing sound
Was wasted on the good man's living ear,
Hath now its own peculiar sanctity,
And at the touch of every wandering breeze
Murmurs not idly o'er his peaceful grave.

PREFACE TO EXCURSION

(1814)

The Title-page announces that this is only a portion of a poem; and the Reader must be here apprised that it belongs to the second part of a long and laborious Work, which is to consist of three parts. —The Author will candidly acknowledge that, if the first of these had been completed, and in such a manner as to satisfy his own mind, he should have preferred the natural order of publication, and have given that to the world first; but, as the second division of the Work was designed to refer more to passing events, and to an existing state of things, than the others were meant to do, more continuous exertion was naturally bestowed upon it, and greater progress made here than in the rest of the poem; and as this part does not depend upon the preceding, to a degree which will materially injure its own peculiar interest, the Author, complying with the earnest entreaties of some valued Friends, presents the following pages to the Public.

It may be proper to state whence the poem, of which *The Excursion* is a part, derives its Title of *The Recluse*.—Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to

whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, *The Recluse;* as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. —The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself: and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the antechapel has to the body of a gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connexion with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices.

The Author would not have deemed himself justified in saying, upon this occasion, so much of performances either unfinished, or unpublished, if he had not thought that the labour bestowed by him upon what he has heretofore and now laid before the Public entitled him to candid attention for such a statement as he thinks necessary to throw light upon his endeavours to please and, he would hope, to benefit his countrymen.—Nothing further need be added, than that the first and third parts of *The Recluse* will consist chiefly of meditations in the Author's own person; and that in the intermediate part (*The Excursion*) the intervention of characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted.

It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself. And in the meantime the following passage, taken from the conclusion of the first book of *The Recluse*, may be acceptable as a kind of *Prospectus* of the design and scope of the whole Poem.

On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
Fair trains of imagery before me rise,
Accompanied by feelings of delight
Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;
And I am conscious of affecting thoughts
And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes
Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh
The good and evil of our mortal state.
—To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,
Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself—
I would give utterance in numerous verse.
Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
Of blessed consolations in distress;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolate retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all—
I sing:—'fit audience let me find though few!'

So prayed, more gaining than he asked, the Bard—

In holiest mood. Urania, I shall need
Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven!
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
All strength—all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form—
Jehovah—with His thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song.
—Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:—and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep

Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument.
—Such grateful haunts foregoing, if I oft
Must turn elsewhere—to travel near the tribes
And fellowships of men, and see ill sights
Of madding passions mutually inflamed;
Must hear Humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore
Within the walls of cities—may these sounds
Have their authentic comment; that even these
Hearing, I be not downcast or forlorn!—
Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st
The human Soul of universal earth,
Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess
A metropolitan temple in the hearts
Of mighty Poets: upon me bestow
A gift of genuine insight; that my Song
With star-like virtue in its place may shine,
Shedding benignant influence, and secure,
Itself, from all malevolent effect
Of those mutations that extend their sway
Throughout the nether sphere!—And if with this
I mix more lowly matter: with the thing
Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
Contemplating: and who, and what he was—

The transitory Being that beheld
This Vision: when and where, and how he lived;
Be not this labour useless. If such theme
May sort with highest objects, then—dread Power!
Whose gracious favour is the primal source
Of all illumination—may my Life
Express the image of a better time,
More wise desires, and simpler manners;—nurse
My Heart in genuine freedom: all pure thoughts
Be with me;—so shall Thy unfailing love
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end!

PREFACE TO POEMS (1815)

DEDICATION

TO SIR GEORGE HOWLAND BEAUMONT, Bart.

My dear Sir George,

Accept my thanks for the permission given me to dedicate these Volumes to you. In addition to a lively pleasure derived from general considerations, I feel a particular satisfaction; for, by inscribing these Poems with your Name, I seem to myself in some degree to repay, by an appropriate honour, the great obligation which I owe to one part of the Collection—as having been the means of first making us personally known to each other. Upon much of the remainder, also, you have a peculiar claim,—for some of the best pieces were composed under the shade of your own groves, upon the classic ground of Coleorton; where I was animated by the recollection of those illustrious Poets of your name and family, who were born in that neighbourhood; and, we may be assured, did not wander with indifference by the dashing stream of Grace Dieu, and among the rocks

that diversify the forest of Charnwood.—Nor is there any one to whom such parts of this Collection as have been inspired or coloured by the beautiful Country from which I now address you, could be presented with more propriety than to yourself—to whom it has suggested so many admirable pictures. Early in life, the sublimity and beauty of this region excited your admiration; and I know that you are bound to it in mind by a still strengthening attachment.

Wishing and hoping that this Work, with the embellishments it has received from your pencil,[1] may survive as a lasting memorial of a friendship, which I reckon among the blessings of my life,

I have the honour to be, my dear Sir George, yours most affectionately and faithfully,

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

Rydal Mount, Westmoreland, February 1, 1815.

PREFACE

THE powers requisite for the production of poetry are: first, those of Observation and Description,—i. e. the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer; whether the things depicted be actually present to the senses, or have a place only in the memory. This power, though indispensable to a Poet, is one which he employs only in submission to necessity, and never for a continuance of time: as its exercise supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects, much in the

[1] The state of the plates has, for some time, not allowed them to be repeated.

same way as a translator or engraver ought to be to his original. 2ndly, Sensibility,—which, the more exquisite it is, the wider will be the range of a poet's perceptions; and the more will he be incited to observe objects, both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted upon by his own mind. (The distinction between poetic and human sensibility has been marked in the character of the Poet delineated in the original preface.) 3rdly, Reflection,—which makes the Poet acquainted with the value of actions, images, thoughts, and feelings; and assists the sensibility in perceiving their connexion with each other. 4thly, Imagination and Fancy,—to modify, to create, and to associate. 5thly, Invention,—by which characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; whether of the Poet's own heart and mind, or of external life and nature; and such incidents and situations produced as are most impressive to the imagination, and most fitted to do justice to the characters, sentiments, and passions, which the Poet undertakes to illustrate. And, lastly, Judgement,—to decide how and where, and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be exerted; so that the less shall not be sacrificed to the greater; nor the greater, slighting the less, arrogate, to its own injury, more than its due. By judgement, also, is determined what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition.[1]

The materials of Poetry, by these powers collected and produced, are cast, by means of various moulds, into divers forms. The moulds may be enumerated, and the forms specified, in the following order. 1st, The Narrative,—including the Epopœia, the

[1] As sensibility to harmony of numbers, and the power of producing it, are invariably attendants upon the faculties above specified, nothing has been said upon those requisites.

Historic Poem, the Tale, the Romance, the Mock-heroic, and, if the spirit of Homer will tolerate such neighbourhood, that dear production of our days, the metrical Novel. Of this Class, the distinguishing mark is, that the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself the source from which everything primarily flows. Epic Poets, in order that their mode of composition may accord with the elevation of their subject, represent themselves as *singing* from the inspiration of the Muse, 'Arma virumque *cano*'; but this is a fiction, in modern times, of slight value: the *Iliad* or the *Paradise Lost* would gain little in our estimation by being chanted. The other poets who belong to this class are commonly content to *tell* their tale;—so that of the whole it may be affirmed that they neither require nor reject the accompaniment of music.

2ndly, The Dramatic,—consisting of Tragedy, Historic Drama, Comedy, and Masque, in which the Poet does not appear at all in his own person, and where the whole action is carried on by speech and dialogue of the agents; music being admitted only incidentally and rarely. The Opera may be placed here, inasmuch as it proceeds by dialogue; though depending, to the degree that it does, upon music, it has a strong claim to be ranked with the lyrical. The characteristic and impassioned Epistle, of which Ovid and Pope have given examples, considered as a species of monodrama, may, without impropriety, be placed in this class.

3rdly, The Lyrical,—containing the Hymn, the Ode, the Elegy, the Song, and the Ballad; in all which, for the production of their *full* effect, an accompaniment of music is indispensable.

4thly, The Idyllium,—descriptive chiefly either of

the processes and appearances of external nature, as the *Seasons* of Thomson; or of characters, manners, and sentiments, as are Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night* of Burns, *The Twa Dogs* of the same Author; or of these in conjunction with the appearances of Nature, as most of the pieces of Theocritus, the *Allegro* and *Penseroso* of Milton, Beattie's *Minstrel*, Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. The Epitaph, the Inscription, the Sonnet, most of the epistles of poets writing in their own persons, and all loco-descriptive poetry, belonging to this class.

5thly, Didactic,—the principal object of which is direct instruction; as the Poem of Lucretius, the *Georgics* of Virgil, *The Fleece* of Dyer, Mason's *English Garden*, &c.

And, lastly, philosophical Satire, like that of Horace and Juvenal; personal and occasional Satire rarely comprehending sufficient of the general in the individual to be dignified with the name of poetry.

Out of the three last has been constructed a composite order, of which Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Cowper's *Task*, are excellent examples.

It is deducible from the above, that poems, apparently miscellaneous, may with propriety be arranged either with reference to the powers of mind *predominant* in the production of them; or to the mould in which they are cast; or, lastly, to the subjects to which they relate. From each of these considerations, the following Poems have been divided into classes; which, that the work may more obviously correspond with the course of human life, and for the sake of exhibiting in it the three requisites of a legitimate whole, a beginning, a middle, and an end, have been also arranged, as far as it was possible, according to an order of time, commencing with

Childhood, and terminating with Old Age, Death, and Immortality. My guiding wish was, that the small pieces of which these Volumes consist, thus discriminated, might be regarded under a twofold view; as composing an entire work within themselves, and as adjuncts to the philosophical Poem, *The Recluse*. This arrangement has long presented itself habitually to my own mind. Nevertheless, I should have preferred to scatter the contents of these volumes at random, if I had been persuaded that, by the plan adopted, anything material would be taken from the natural effect of the pieces, individually, on the mind of the unreflecting Reader. I trust there is a sufficient variety in each class to prevent this; while, for him who reads with reflection, the arrangement will serve as a commentary unostentatiously directing his attention to my purposes, both particular and general. But, as I wish to guard against the possibility of misleading by this classification, it is proper first to remind the Reader, that certain poems are placed according to the powers of mind, in the Author's conception, predominant in the production of them; *predominant*, which implies the exertion of other faculties in less degree. Where there is more imagination than fancy in a poem, it is placed under the head of imagination, and *vice versâ*. Both the above classes might without impropriety have been enlarged from that consisting of 'Poems founded on the Affections'; as might this latter from those, and from the class 'proceeding from Sentiment and Reflection'. The most striking characteristics of each piece, mutual illustration, variety, and proportion, have governed me throughout.

None of the other Classes, except those of Fancy and Imagination, require any particular notice. But

a remark of general application may be made. All Poets, except the dramatic, have been in the practice of feigning that their works were composed to the music of the harp or lyre: with what degree of affectation this has been done in modern times, I leave to the judicious to determine. For my own part, I have not been disposed to violate probability so far, or to make such a large demand upon the Reader's charity. Some of these pieces are essentially lyrical; and, therefore, cannot have their due force without a supposed musical accompaniment; but, in much the greatest part, as a substitute for the classic lyre or romantic harp, I require nothing more than an animated or impassioned recitation, adapted to the subject. Poems, however humble in their kind, if they be good in that kind, cannot read themselves; the law of long syllable and short must not be so inflexible,—the letter of metre must not be so impassive to the spirit of versification,—as to deprive the Reader of all voluntary power to modulate, in subordination to the sense, the music of the poem;—in the same manner as his mind is left at liberty, and even summoned, to act upon its thoughts and images. But, though the accompaniment of a musical instrument be frequently dispensed with, the true Poet does not therefore abandon his privilege distinct from that of the mere Proseman;

> He murmurs near the running brooks
> A sweeter music than their own.

Let us come now to the consideration of the words Fancy and Imagination, as employed in the classification of the following Poems. 'A man', says an intelligent author, 'has imagination in proportion as he can distinctly copy in idea the impressions of sense: it is the faculty which *images* within the mind

the phenomena of sensation. A man has fancy in proportion as he can call up, connect, or associate, at pleasure, those internal images (*φαντάζειν* is to cause to appear) so as to complete ideal representations of absent objects. Imagination is the power of depicting, and fancy of evoking and combining. The imagination is formed by patient observation; the fancy by a voluntary activity in shifting the scenery of the mind. The more accurate the imagination, the more safely may a painter, or a poet, undertake a delineation, or a description, without the presence of the objects to be characterized. The more versatile the fancy, the more original and striking will be the decorations produced.'—*British Synonyms discriminated by W. Taylor.*

Is not this as if a man should undertake to supply an account of a building, and be so intent upon what he had discovered of the foundation, as to conclude his task without once looking up at the superstructure? Here, as in other instances throughout the volume, the judicious Author's mind is enthralled by Etymology; he takes up the original word as his guide and escort, and too often does not perceive how soon he becomes its prisoner, without liberty to tread in any path but that to which it confines him. It is not easy to find out how imagination, thus explained, differs from distinct remembrance of images; or fancy from quick and vivid recollection of them: each is nothing more than a mode of memory. If the two words bear the above meaning, and no other, what term is left to designate that faculty of which the Poet is 'all compact'; he whose eye glances from earth to heaven, whose spiritual attributes body forth what his pen is prompt in turning to shape; or what is left to characterize Fancy, as insinuating herself into the heart of objects with creative activity?—

Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. I proceed to illustrate my meaning by instances. A parrot *hangs* from the wires of his cage by his beak or by his claws; or a monkey from the bough of a tree by his paws or his tail. Each creature does so literally and actually. In the first Eclogue of Virgil, the shepherd, thinking of the time when he is to take leave of his farm, thus addresses his goats:—

Non ego vos posthac viridi projectus in antro
Dumosa *pendere* procul de rupe videbo.

——— half way down
Hangs one who gathers samphire,

is the well-known expression of Shakespeare, delineating an ordinary image upon the cliffs of Dover. In these two instances is a slight exertion of the faculty which I denominate imagination, in the use of one word: neither the goats nor the samphire-gatherer do literally hang, as does the parrot or the monkey; but, presenting to the senses something of such an appearance, the mind in its activity, for its own gratification, contemplates them as hanging.

As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
Of Ternate or Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
Ply, stemming nightly toward the Pole; so seemed
Far off the flying Fiend.

Here is the full strength of the imagination involved in the word *hangs*, and exerted upon the whole image: First, the fleet, an aggregate of many ships, is represented as one mighty person, whose track, we know and feel, is upon the waters; but, taking advantage of its appearance to the senses, the Poet dares to represent it as *hanging in the clouds*, both for the gratification of the mind in contemplating the image itself, and in reference to the motion and appearance of the sublime objects to which it is compared.

From impressions of sight we will pass to those of sound; which, as they must necessarily be of a less definite character, shall be selected from these volumes:

Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove *broods;*

of the same bird,

> His voice was *buried* among trees,
> Yet to be come at by the breeze;
>
> O, Cuckoo! shall I call thee *Bird*,
> Or but a wandering *Voice?*

The stock-dove is said to *coo*, a sound well imitating the note of the bird; but, by the intervention of the metaphor *broods*, the affections are called in by the imagination to assist in marking the manner in which the bird reiterates and prolongs her soft note, as if herself delighting to listen to it, and participating of a still and quiet satisfaction, like that which may be supposed inseparable from the continuous process of incubation. 'His voice was buried among trees,' a metaphor expressing the love of *seclusion* by which this Bird is marked; and characterizing its note as not partaking of the shrill and the piercing, and

therefore more easily deadened by the intervening shade; yet a note so peculiar and withal so pleasing, that the breeze, gifted with that love of the sound which the Poet feels, penetrates the shades in which it is entombed, and conveys it to the ear of the listener.

> Shall I call thee Bird,
> Or but a wandering Voice?

This concise interrogation characterizes the seeming ubiquity of the voice of the cuckoo, and dispossesses the creature almost of a corporeal existence; the Imagination being tempted to this exertion of her power by a consciousness in the memory that the cuckoo is almost perpetually heard throughout the season of spring, but seldom becomes an object of sight.

Thus far of images independent of each other, and immediately endowed by the mind with properties that do not inhere in them, upon an incitement from properties and qualities the existence of which is inherent and obvious. These processes of imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to re-act upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence.

I pass from the Imagination acting upon an individual image to a consideration of the same faculty employed upon images in a conjunction by which they modify each other. The Reader has already had a fine instance before him in the passage quoted from Virgil, where the apparently perilous situation of the goat, hanging upon the shaggy precipice, is contrasted with that of the shepherd contemplating it from the seclusion of the cavern in

which he lies stretched at ease and in security. Take these images separately, and how unaffecting the picture compared with that produced by their being thus connected with, and opposed to, each other!

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence,
Wonder to all who do the same espy
By what means it could thither come, and whence,
So that it seems a thing endued with sense,
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun himself.

Such seemed this Man; not all alive or dead
Nor all asleep, in his extreme old age.

. . . . . .

Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth altogether if it move at all.

In these images, the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination, immediately and mediately acting, are all brought into conjunction. The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison. After what has been said, the image of the cloud need not be commented upon.

Thus far of an endowing or modifying power: but the Imagination also shapes and *creates;* and how?

By innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number,—alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers. Recur to the passage already cited from Milton. When the compact Fleet, as one Person, has been introduced 'sailing from Bengala', 'They', i. e. the 'merchants', representing the fleet resolved into a multitude of ships, 'ply' their voyage towards the extremities of the earth: 'So' (referring to the word 'As' in the commencement) 'seemed the flying Fiend'; the image of his Person acting to recombine the multitude of ships into one body,—the point from which the comparison set out. 'So seemed,' and to whom seemed? To the heavenly Muse who dictates the poem, to the eye of the Poet's mind, and to that of the Reader, present at one moment in the wide Ethiopian, and the next in the solitudes, then first broken in upon, of the infernal regions!

Modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.

Hear again this mighty Poet,—speaking of the Messiah going forth to expel from heaven the rebellious angels,

Attended by ten thousand thousand Saints
He onward came: far off his coming shone,—

the retinue of Saints, and the Person of the Messiah himself, lost almost and merged in the splendour of that indefinite abstraction 'His coming!'

As I do not mean here to treat this subject further than to throw some light upon the present Volumes, and especially upon one division of them, I shall spare myself and the Reader the trouble of considering the

Imagination as it deals with thoughts and sentiments, as it regulates the composition of characters, and determines the course of actions: I will not consider it (more than I have already done by implication) as that power which, in the language of one of my most esteemed Friends, 'draws all things to one; which makes things animate or inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect.'[1] The grand store-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contra-distinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton; to which I cannot forbear to add those of Spenser. I select these writers in preference to those of ancient Greece and Rome, because the anthropomorphitism of the Pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form; from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry. This abhorrence was almost as strong in our great epic Poet, both from circumstances of his life, and from the constitution of his mind. However imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul; and all things tended in him towards the sublime. Spenser, of a gentler nature, maintained his freedom by aid of his allegorical spirit, at one time inciting him to create persons out of abstractions; and, at another, by a superior effort of genius, to give the universality and permanence of abstractions to his human beings, by means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations,—of which his character of Una is a glorious example. Of the human and dramatic Imagination the works of Shakespeare are an inexhaustible source.

[1] Charles Lamb upon the genius of Hogarth.

I tax not you, ye Elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdoms, call'd you Daughters!

And if, bearing in mind the many Poets distinguished by this prime quality, whose names I omit to mention; yet justified by recollection of the insults which the ignorant, the incapable, and the presumptuous, have heaped upon these and my other writings, I may be permitted to anticipate the judgement of posterity upon myself, I shall declare (censurable, I grant, if the notoriety of the fact above stated does not justify me) that I have given in these unfavourable times evidence of exertions of this faculty upon its worthiest objects, the external universe, the moral and religious sentiments of Man, his natural affections, and his acquired passions; which have the same ennobling tendency as the productions of men, in this kind, worthy to be holden in undying remembrance.

To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterized as the power of evoking and combining, or, as my friend Mr. Coleridge has styled it, 'the aggregative and associative power,' my objection is only that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose. Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent. Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the

indefinite. She leaves it to Fancy to describe Queen Mab as coming,

> In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
> On the fore-finger of an alderman.

Having to speak of stature, she does not tell you that her gigantic Angel was as tall as Pompey's Pillar; much less that he was twelve cubits, or twelve hundred cubits high; or that his dimensions equalled those of Teneriffe or Atlas;—because these, and if they were a million times as high it would be the same, are bounded: The expression is, 'His stature reached the sky!' the illimitable firmament!—When the Imagination frames a comparison, if it does not strike on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows—and continues to grow—upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal, properties: moreover, the images invariably modify each other.—The law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic, as the objects happen to be appositely produced or fortunately combined. Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images; trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for the want of individual value: or she prides herself upon the curious subtilty and the successful elaboration with which she can detect their lurking affinities. If she can win you over to her purpose, and impart to you her feelings, she cares not how unstable or transitory may be her influence,

knowing that it will not be out of her power to resume it upon an apt occasion. But the Imagination is conscious of an indestructible dominion;—the Soul may fall away from it, not being able to sustain its grandeur; but, if once felt and acknowledged, by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished.—Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal.—Yet is it not the less true that Fancy, as she is an active, is also, under her own laws and in her own spirit, a creative faculty? In what manner Fancy ambitiously aims at a rivalship with Imagination, and Imagination stoops to work with the materials of Fancy, might be illustrated from the compositions of all eloquent writers, whether in prose or verse; and chiefly from those of our own Country. Scarcely a page of the impassioned parts of Bishop Taylor's Works can be opened that shall not afford examples.—Referring the Reader to those inestimable volumes, I will content myself with placing a conceit (ascribed to Lord Chesterfield) in contrast with a passage from the *Paradise Lost*:—

The dews of the evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of the sun.

After the transgression of Adam, Milton, with other appearances of sympathizing Nature, thus marks the immediate consequence,

Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completion of the mortal sin.

The associating link is the same in each instance: Dew and rain, not distinguishable from the liquid substance of tears, are employed as indications of sorrow. A flash of surprise is the effect in the former case; a flash of surprise, and nothing more; for the

nature of things does not sustain the combination. In the latter, the effects from the act, of which there is this immediate consequence and visible sign, are so momentous, that the mind acknowledges the justice and reasonableness of the sympathy in nature so manifested; and the sky weeps drops of water as if with human eyes, as 'Earth had before trembled from her entrails, and Nature given a second groan'.

Finally, I will refer to Cotton's *Ode upon Winter*, an admirable composition, though stained with some peculiarities of the age in which he lived, for a general illustration of the characteristics of Fancy. The middle part of this ode contains a most lively description of the entrance of Winter, with his retinue, as 'A palsied king', and yet a military monarch,—advancing for conquest with his army; the several bodies of which, and their arms and equipments, are described with a rapidity of detail, and a profusion of *fanciful* comparisons, which indicate on the part of the poet extreme activity of intellect, and a correspondent hurry of delightful feeling. Winter retires from the foe into his fortress, where

> a magazine
> Of sovereign juice is cellared in;
> Liquor that will the siege maintain
> Should Phoebus ne'er return again.

Though myself a water drinker, I cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing what follows, as an instance still more happy of Fancy employed in the treatment of feeling than, in its preceding passages, the Poem supplies of her management of forms.

> 'Tis that, that gives the poet rage,
> And thaws the gelid blood of age;
> Matures the young, restores the old,
> And makes the fainting coward bold.

It lays the careful head to rest,
Calms palpitations in the breast,
Renders our lives' misfortune sweet;

. . . . . .

Then let the chill Sirocco blow,
And gird us round with hills of snow,
Or else go whistle to the shore,
And make the hollow mountains roar,

Whilst we together jovial sit
Careless, and crowned with mirth and wit,
Where, though bleak winds confine us home
Our fancies round the world shall roam.

We'll think of all the Friends we know,
And drink to all worth drinking to;
When having drunk all thine and mine,
We rather shall want healths than wine.

But where Friends fail us, we'll supply
Our friendships with our charity;
Men that remote in sorrows live,
Shall by our lusty brimmers thrive.

We'll drink the wanting into wealth,
And those that languish into health,
The afflicted into joy; th' opprest
Into security and rest.

The worthy in disgrace shall find
Favour return again more kind,
And in restraint who stifled lie,
Shall taste the air of liberty.

The brave shall triumph in success,
The lover shall have mistresses,
Poor unregarded Virtue, praise,
And the neglected Poet, bays.

Thus shall our healths do others good,
Whilst we ourselves do all we would;
For, freed from envy and from care,
What would we be but what we are?

When I sate down to write this Preface, it was my intention to have made it more comprehensive; but, thinking that I ought rather to apologize for detaining the reader so long, I will here conclude.

ESSAY SUPPLEMENTARY TO PREFACE (1815)

With the young of both sexes, Poetry is, like love, a passion; but, for much the greater part of those who have been proud of its power over their minds, a necessity soon arises of breaking the pleasing bondage; or it relaxes of itself;—the thoughts being occupied in domestic cares, or the time engrossed by business. Poetry then becomes only an occasional recreation; while to those whose existence passes away in a course of fashionable pleasure, it is a species of luxurious amusement. In middle and declining age, a scattered number of serious persons resort to poetry, as to religion, for a protection against the pressure of trivial employments, and as a consolation for the afflictions of life. And, lastly, there are many, who, having been enamoured of this art in their youth, have found leisure, after youth was spent, to cultivate general literature; in which poetry has continued to be comprehended *as a study*.

Into the above classes the Readers of poetry may be divided; Critics abound in them all; but from the last only can opinions be collected of absolute value, and worthy to be depended upon, as prophetic

of the destiny of a new work. The young, who in nothing can escape delusion, are especially subject to it in their intercourse with Poetry. The cause, not so obvious as the fact is unquestionable, is the same as that from which erroneous judgements in this art, in the minds of men of all ages, chiefly proceed; but upon Youth it operates with peculiar force. The appropriate business of poetry (which, nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science), her appropriate employment, her privilege and her *duty*, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*. What a world of delusion does this acknowledged obligation prepare for the inexperienced! what temptations to go astray are here held forth for them whose thoughts have been little disciplined by the understanding, and whose feelings revolt from the sway of reason!—When a juvenile Reader is in the height of his rapture with some vicious passage, should experience throw in doubts, or common sense suggest suspicions, a lurking consciousness that the realities of the Muse are but shows, and that her liveliest excitements are raised by transient shocks of conflicting feeling and successive assemblages of contradictory thoughts—is ever at hand to justify extravagance, and to sanction absurdity. But, it may be asked, as these illusions are unavoidable, and, no doubt, eminently useful to the mind as a process, what good can be gained by making observations, the tendency of which is to diminish the confidence of youth in its feelings, and thus to abridge its innocent and even profitable pleasures? The reproach implied in the question could not be warded off, if Youth were incapable of being delighted with what is truly excellent; or, if

these errors always terminated of themselves in due season. But, with the majority, though their force be abated, they continue through life. Moreover, the fire of youth is too vivacious an element to be extinguished or damped by a philosophical remark; and, while there is no danger that what has been said will be injurious or painful to the ardent and the confident, it may prove beneficial to those who, being enthusiastic, are, at the same time, modest and ingenuous. The intimation may unite with their own misgivings to regulate their sensibility, and to bring in, sooner than it would otherwise have arrived, a more discreet and sound judgement.

If it should excite wonder that men of ability, in later life, whose understandings have been rendered acute by practice in affairs, should be so easily and so far imposed upon when they happen to take up a new work in verse, this appears to be the cause;—that, having discontinued their attention to poetry, whatever progress may have been made in other departments of knowledge, they have not, as to this art, advanced in true discernment beyond the age of youth. If, then, a new poem fall in their way, whose attractions are of that kind which would have enraptured them during the heat of youth, the judgement not being improved to a degree that they shall be disgusted, they are dazzled; and prize and cherish the faults for having had power to make the present time vanish before them, and to throw the mind back, as by enchantment, into the happiest season of life. As they read, powers seem to be revived, passions are regenerated, and pleasures restored. The Book was probably taken up after an escape from the burden of business, and with a wish to forget the world, and all its vexations and anxieties. Having obtained this wish, and so much more, it is

natural that they should make report as they have felt.

If Men of mature age, through want of practice, be thus easily beguiled into admiration of absurdities, extravagances, and misplaced ornaments, thinking it proper that their understandings should enjoy a holiday, while they are unbending their minds with verse, it may be expected that such Readers will resemble their former selves also in strength of prejudice, and an inaptitude to be moved by the unostentatious beauties of a pure style. In the higher poetry, an enlightened Critic chiefly looks for a reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination. Wherever these appear, simplicity accompanies them; Magnificence herself, when legitimate, depending upon a simplicity of her own, to regulate her ornaments. But it is a well-known property of human nature, that our estimates are ever governed by comparisons, of which we are conscious with various degrees of distinctness. Is it not, then, inevitable (confining these observations to the effects of style merely) that an eye, accustomed to the glaring hues of diction by which such Readers are caught and excited, will for the most part be rather repelled than attracted by an original Work, the colouring of which is disposed according to a pure and refined scheme of harmony? It is in the fine arts as in the affairs of life, no man can *serve* (i. e. obey with zeal and fidelity) two Masters.

As Poetry is most just to its own divine origin when it administers the comforts and breathes the spirit of religion, they who have learned to perceive this truth, and who betake themselves to reading verse for sacred purposes, must be preserved from numerous illusions to which the two Classes of Readers, whom we have been considering, are liable.

But, as the mind grows serious from the weight of life, the range of its passions is contracted accordingly; and its sympathies become so exclusive, that many species of high excellence wholly escape, or but languidly excite, its notice. Besides, men who read from religious or moral inclinations, even when the subject is of that kind which they approve, are beset with misconceptions and mistakes peculiar to themselves. Attaching so much importance to the truths which interest them, they are prone to overrate the Authors by whom those truths are expressed and enforced. They come prepared to impart so much passion to the Poet's language, that they remain unconscious how little, in fact, they receive from it. And, on the other hand, religious faith is to him who holds it so momentous a thing, and error appears to be attended with such tremendous consequences, that, if opinions touching upon religion occur which the Reader condemns, he not only cannot sympathize with them, however animated the expression, but there is, for the most part, an end put to all satisfaction and enjoyment. Love, if it before existed, is converted into dislike; and the heart of the Reader is set against the Author and his book.—To these excesses, they, who from their professions ought to be the most guarded against them, are perhaps the most liable; I mean those sects whose religion, being from the calculating understanding, is cold and formal. For when Christianity, the religion of humility, is founded upon the proudest faculty of our nature, what can be expected but contradictions? Accordingly, believers of this cast are at one time contemptuous; at another, being troubled, as they are and must be, with inward misgivings, they are jealous and suspicious;—and at all seasons, they are under temptation to supply by the

heat with which they defend their tenets, the animation which is wanting to the constitution of the religion itself.

Faith was given to man that his affections, detached from the treasures of time, might be inclined to settle upon those of eternity;—the elevation of his nature, which this habit produces on earth, being to him a presumptive evidence of a future state of existence; and giving him a title to partake of its holiness. The religious man values what he sees chiefly as an 'imperfect shadowing forth' of what he is incapable of seeing. The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry; between religion—making up the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry—passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion—whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription, and reconciled to substitutions; and poetry—ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation. In this community of nature may be perceived also the lurking incitements of kindred error;—so that we shall find that no poetry has been more subject to distortion, than that species, the argument and scope of which is religious; and no lovers of the art have gone farther astray than the pious and the devout.

Whither then shall we turn for that union of

qualifications which must necessarily exist before the decisions of a critic can be of absolute value? For a mind at once poetical and philosophical; for a critic whose affections are as free and kindly as the spirit of society, and whose understanding is severe as that of dispassionate government? Where are we to look for that initiatory composure of mind which no selfishness can disturb? For a natural sensibility that has been tutored into correctness without losing anything of its quickness; and for active faculties, capable of answering the demands which an Author of original imagination shall make upon them, associated with a judgement that cannot be duped into admiration by aught that is unworthy of it?—among those and those only, who, never having suffered their youthful love of poetry to remit much of its force, have applied to the consideration of the laws of this art the best power of their understandings. At the same time it must be observed—that, as this Class comprehends the only judgements which are trustworthy, so does it include the most erroneous and perverse. For to be mistaught is worse than to be untaught; and no perverseness equals that which is supported by system, no errors are so difficult to root out as those which the understanding has pledged its credit to uphold. In this Class are contained censors, who, if they be pleased with what is good, are pleased with it only by imperfect glimpses, and upon false principles; who, should they generalize rightly, to a certain point, are sure to suffer for it in the end; who, if they stumble upon a sound rule, are fettered by misapplying it, or by straining it too far; being incapable of perceiving when it ought to yield to one of higher order. In it are found critics too petulant to be passive to a genuine poet, and too feeble to grapple

with him; men, who take upon them to report of the course which *he* holds whom they are utterly unable to accompany,—confounded if he turn quick upon the wing, dismayed if he soar steadily 'into the region';—men of palsied imaginations and indurated hearts; in whose minds all healthy action is languid, who therefore feed as the many direct them, or, with the many, are greedy after vicious provocatives;—judges, whose censure is auspicious, and whose praise ominous! In this class meet together the two extremes of best and worst.

The observations presented in the foregoing series are of too ungracious a nature to have been made without reluctance; and, were it only on this account, I would invite the reader to try them by the test of comprehensive experience. If the number of judges who can be confidently relied upon be in reality so small, it ought to follow that partial notice only, or neglect, perhaps long continued, or attention wholly inadequate to their merits—must have been the fate of most works in the higher departments of poetry; and that, on the other hand, numerous productions have blazed into popularity, and have passed away, leaving scarcely a trace behind them: it will be further found, that when Authors shall have at length raised themselves into general admiration and maintained their ground, errors and prejudices have prevailed concerning their genius and their works, which the few who are conscious of those errors and prejudices would deplore; if they were not recompensed by perceiving that there are select Spirits for whom it is ordained that their fame shall be in the world an existence like that of Virtue, which owes its being to the struggles it makes, and its vigour to the enemies whom it provokes;—a vivacious quality, ever doomed

to meet with opposition, and still triumphing over it; and, from the nature of its dominion, incapable of being brought to the sad conclusion of Alexander, when he wept that there were no more worlds for him to conquer.

Let us take a hasty retrospect of the poetical literature of this Country for the greater part of the last two centuries, and see if the facts support these inferences.

Who is there that now reads the *Creation* of Dubartas? Yet all Europe once resounded with his praise; he was caressed by kings; and, when his Poem was translated into our language, the *Faery Queen* faded before it. The name of Spenser, whose genius is of a higher order than even that of Ariosto, is at this day scarcely known beyond the limits of the British Isles. And if the value of his works is to be estimated from the attention now paid to them by his countrymen, compared with that which they bestow on those of some other writers, it must be pronounced small indeed.

> The laurel, meed of mighty conquerors
> And poets *sage*—

are his own words; but his wisdom has, in this particular, been his worst enemy: while its opposite, whether in the shape of folly or madness, has been *their* best friend. But he was a great power, and bears a high name: the laurel has been awarded to him.

A dramatic Author, if he write for the stage, must adapt himself to the taste of the audience, or they will not endure him; accordingly the mighty genius of Shakespeare was listened to. The people were delighted: but I am not sufficiently versed in stage antiquities to determine whether they did not flock

as eagerly to the representation of many pieces of contemporary Authors, wholly undeserving to appear upon the same boards. Had there been a formal contest for superiority among dramatic writers, that Shakespeare, like his predecessors Sophocles and Euripides, would have often been subject to the mortification of seeing the prize adjudged to sorry competitors, becomes too probable, when we reflect that the admirers of Settle and Shadwell were, in a later age, as numerous, and reckoned as respectable, in point of talent, as those of Dryden. At all events, that Shakespeare stooped to accommodate himself to the People, is sufficiently apparent; and one of the most striking proofs of his almost omnipotent genius is, that he could turn to such glorious purpose those materials which the prepossessions of the age compelled him to make use of. Yet even this marvellous skill appears not to have been enough to prevent his rivals from having some advantage over him in public estimation; else how can we account for passages and scenes that exist in his works, unless upon a supposition that some of the grossest of them, a fact which in my own mind I have no doubt of, were foisted in by the Players, for the gratification of the many?

But that his Works, whatever might be their reception upon the stage, made but little impression upon the ruling Intellects of the time, may be inferred from the fact that Lord Bacon, in his multifarious writings, nowhere either quotes or alludes to him.[1] His dramatic excellence enabled

[1] The learned Hakewill (a third edition of whose book bears date 1635), writing to refute the error 'touching Nature's perpetual and universal decay', cites triumphantly the names of Ariosto, Tasso, Bartas, and Spenser, as instances that poetic genius had not degenerated; but he makes no mention of Shakespeare.

him to resume possession of the stage after the Restoration; but Dryden tells us that in his time two of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were acted for one of Shakespeare's. And so faint and limited was the perception of the poetic beauties of his dramas in the time of Pope, that, in his Edition of the Plays, with a view of rendering to the general reader a necessary service, he printed between inverted commas those passages which he thought most worthy of notice.

At this day, the French Critics have abated nothing of their aversion to this darling of our Nation: 'the English, with their bouffon de Shakespeare,' is as familiar an expression among them as in the time of Voltaire. Baron Grimm is the only French writer who seems to have perceived his infinite superiority to the first names of the French Theatre; an advantage which the Parisian Critic owed to his German blood and German education. The most enlightened Italians, though well acquainted with our language, are wholly incompetent to measure the proportions of Shakespeare. The Germans only, of foreign nations, are approaching towards a knowledge and feeling of what he is. In some respects they have acquired a superiority over the fellow countrymen of the Poet: for among us it is a current, I might say, an established opinion, that Shakespeare is justly praised when he is pronounced to be 'a wild irregular genius, in whom great faults are compensated by great beauties'. How long may it be before this misconception passes away, and it becomes universally acknowledged that the judgement of Shakespeare in the selection of his materials, and in the manner in which he has made them, heterogeneous as they often are, constitute a unity of their own, and contribute all to one great end, is not less admirable

than his imagination, his invention, and his intuitive knowledge of human Nature?

There is extant a small Volume of miscellaneous poems, in which Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person. It is not difficult to conceive that the Editor, George Steevens, should have been insensible to the beauties of one portion of that Volume, the Sonnets; though in no part of the writings of this Poet is found, in an equal compass, a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed. But, from regard to the Critic's own credit, he would not have ventured to talk of an [1] act of parliament not being strong enough to compel the perusal of those little pieces, if he had not known that the people of England were ignorant of the treasures contained in them: and if he had not, moreover, shared the too common propensity of human nature to exult over a supposed fall into the mire of a genius whom he had been compelled to regard with admiration, as an inmate of the celestial regions—'there sitting where he durst not soar.'

Nine years before the death of Shakespeare, Milton was born; and early in life he published several small poems, which, though on their first appearance they were praised by a few of the judicious, were afterwards neglected to that degree, that Pope in his youth could borrow from them without risk of its being known. Whether these poems are at this day justly appreciated, I will not undertake to decide: nor would it imply a severe reflection

[1] This flippant insensibility was publicly reprehended by Mr. Coleridge in a course of Lectures upon Poetry given by him at the Royal Institution. For the various merits of thought and language in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, see Nos. 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 54, 64, 66, 68, 73, 76, 86, 91, 92, 93, 97, 98, 105, 107, 108, 109, 111, 113, 114, 116, 117, 129, and many others.

upon the mass of readers to suppose the contrary; seeing that a man of the acknowledged genius of Voss, the German poet, could suffer their spirit to evaporate; and could change their character, as is done in the translation made by him of the most popular of those pieces. At all events, it is certain that these Poems of Milton are now much read, and loudly praised; yet were they little heard of till more than 150 years after their publication; and of the Sonnets, Dr. Johnson, as appears from Boswell's *Life* of him, was in the habit of thinking and speaking as contemptuously as Steevens wrote upon those of Shakespeare.

About the time when the Pindaric odes of Cowley and his imitators, and the productions of that class of curious thinkers whom Dr. Johnson has strangely styled metaphysical Poets, were beginning to lose something of that extravagant admiration which they had excited, the *Paradise Lost* made its appearance. 'Fit audience find though few,' was the petition addressed by the Poet to his inspiring Muse. I have said elsewhere that he gained more than he asked; this I believe to be true; but Dr. Johnson has fallen into a gross mistake when he attempts to prove, by the sale of the work, that Milton's Countrymen were '*just* to it' upon its first appearance. Thirteen hundred Copies were sold in two years; an uncommon example, he asserts, of the prevalence of genius in opposition to so much recent enmity as Milton's public conduct had excited. But, be it remembered that, if Milton's political and religious opinions, and the manner in which he announced them, had raised him many enemies, they had procured him numerous friends; who, as all personal danger was passed away at the time of publication, would be eager to procure the master-

work of a man whom they revered, and whom they would be proud of praising. Take, from the number of purchasers, persons of this class, and also those who wished to possess the Poem as a religious work, and but few I fear would be left who sought for it on account of its poetical merits. The demand did not immediately increase; 'for', says Dr. Johnson, 'many more readers' (he means persons in the habit of reading poetry) 'than were supplied at first the Nation did not afford.' How careless must a writer be who can make this assertion in the face of so many existing title-pages to belie it! Turning to my own shelves, I find the folio of Cowley, seventh edition, 1681. A book near it is Flatman's Poems, fourth edition, 1686; Waller, fifth edition, same date. The Poems of Norris of Bemerton not long after went, I believe, through nine editions. What further demand there might be for these works I do not know; but I well remember that, twenty-five years ago, the booksellers' stalls in London swarmed with the folios of Cowley. This is not mentioned in disparagement of that able writer and amiable man; but merely to show that, if Milton's work were not more read, it was not because readers did not exist at the time. The early editions of the *Paradise Lost* were printed in a shape which allowed them to be sold at a low price, yet only three thousand copies of the Work were sold in eleven years; and the Nation, says Dr. Johnson, had been satisfied from 1623 to 1664, that is, forty-one years, with only two editions of the Works of Shakespeare; which probably did not together make one thousand Copies; facts adduced by the critic to prove the 'paucity of Readers.'—There were readers in multitudes; but their money went for other purposes, as their admiration was

fixed elsewhere. We are authorized, then, to affirm that the reception of the *Paradise Lost*, and the slow progress of its fame, are proofs as striking as can be desired that the positions which I am attempting to establish are not erroneous.[1]—How amusing to shape to one's self such a critique as a Wit of Charles's days, or a Lord of the Miscellanies or trading Journalist of King William's time, would have brought forth, if he had set his faculties industriously to work upon this Poem, everywhere impregnated with *original* excellence.

So strange indeed are the obliquities of admiration, that they whose opinions are much influenced by authority will often be tempted to think that there are no fixed principles[2] in human nature for this art to rest upon. I have been honoured by being permitted to peruse in MS. a tract composed between the period of the Revolution and the close of that century. It is the Work of an English Peer of high accomplishments, its object to form the character and direct the studies of his son. Perhaps nowhere does a more beautiful treatise of the kind exist. The good sense and wisdom of the thoughts, the delicacy of the feelings, and the charm of the style, are, throughout, equally conspicuous. Yet the Author, selecting among the Poets of his own country those whom he deems most worthy of his son's perusal, particularizes only Lord Rochester,

[1] Hughes is express upon this subject: in his dedication of Spenser's Works to Lord Somers, he writes thus: 'It was your Lordship's encouraging a beautiful edition of *Paradise Lost* that first brought that incomparable Poem to be generally known and esteemed.'

[2] This opinion seems actually to have been entertained by Adam Smith, the worst critic, David Hume not excepted, that Scotland, a soil to which this sort of weed seems natural, has produced.

Sir John Denham, and Cowley. Writing about the same time, Shaftesbury, an author at present unjustly depreciated, describes the English Muses as only yet lisping in their cradles.

The arts by which Pope, soon afterwards, contrived to procure to himself a more general and a higher reputation than perhaps any English Poet ever attained during his lifetime, are known to the judicious. And as well known is it to them, that the undue exertion of those arts is the cause why Pope has for some time held a rank in literature, to which, if he had not been seduced by an over-love of immediate popularity, and had confided more in his native genius, he never could have descended. He bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style, and was himself blinded by his own success. Having wandered from humanity in his Eclogues with boyish inexperience, the praise, which these compositions obtained, tempted him into a belief that Nature was not to be trusted, at least in pastoral Poetry. To prove this by example, he put his friend Gay upon writing those Eclogues which their author intended to be burlesque. The instigator of the work, and his admirers, could perceive in them nothing but what was ridiculous. Nevertheless, though these Poems contain some detestable passages, the effect, as Dr. Johnson well observes, 'of reality and truth became conspicuous even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded. The Pastorals, ludicrous to such as prided themselves upon their refinement, in spite of those disgusting passages, 'became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations.'

Something less than sixty years after the publication of the *Paradise Lost* appeared Thomson's

Winter; which was speedily followed by his other Seasons. It is a work of inspiration; much of it is written from himself, and nobly from himself. How was it received? 'It was no sooner read', says one of his contemporary biographers, 'than universally admired: those only excepted who had not been used to feel, or to look for anything in poetry, beyond a *point* of satirical or epigrammatic wit, a smart *antithesis* richly trimmed with rime, or the softness of an *elegiac* complaint. To such his manly classical spirit could not readily commend itself; till, after a more attentive perusal, they had got the better of their prejudices, and either acquired or affected a truer taste. A few others stood aloof, merely because they had long before fixed the articles of their poetical creed, and resigned themselves to an absolute despair of ever seeing anything new and original. These were somewhat mortified to find their notions disturbed by the appearance of a poet, who seemed to owe nothing but to nature and his own genius. But, in a short time, the applause became unanimous; every one wondering how so many pictures, and pictures so familiar, should have moved them but faintly to what they felt in his descriptions. His digressions too, the overflowings of a tender benevolent heart, charmed the reader no less; leaving him in doubt, whether he should more admire the Poet or love the Man.'

This case appears to bear strongly against us:—but we must distinguish between wonder and legitimate admiration. The subject of the work is the changes produced in the appearances of nature by the revolution of the year: and, by undertaking to write in verse, Thomson pledged himself to treat his subject as became a Poet. Now, it is remarkable that, excepting the nocturnal *Reverie of Lady*

Winchelsea, and a passage or two in the *Windsor Forest* of Pope, the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the *Paradise Lost* and the *Seasons* does not contain a single new image of external nature; and scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred that the eye of the Poet had been steadily fixed upon his object, much less that his feelings had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination. To what a low state knowledge of the most obvious and important phenomena had sunk, is evident from the style in which Dryden has executed a description of Night in one of his Tragedies, and Pope his translation of the celebrated moonlight scene in the *Iliad*. A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him, might easily depict these appearances with more truth. Dryden's lines are vague, bombastic, and senseless [1]; those of Pope, though he had Homer to guide him, are throughout false and contradictory. The verses of Dryden, once highly celebrated, are forgotten; those of Pope still retain their hold upon public estimation,—nay, there is not a passage of descriptive poetry, which at this day finds so many and such ardent admirers. Strange to think of an enthusiast, as may have been the case with thousands, reciting those verses under the cope of a moonlight sky, without having his raptures in the least disturbed by a suspicion of

[1] CORTES, *alone in a night-gown.*

All things are hush'd as Nature's self lay dead;
The mountains seem to nod their drowsy head.
The little Birds in dreams their songs repeat,
And sleeping Flowers beneath the Night-dew sweat:
Even Lust and Envy Sleep; yet Love denies
Rest to my soul, and slumber to my eyes.

DRYDEN'S *Indian Emperor.*

their absurdity!—If these two distinguished writers could habitually think that the visible universe was of so little consequence to a poet, that it was scarcely necessary for him to cast his eyes upon it, we may be assured that those passages of the elder poets which faithfully and poetically describe the phenomena of nature, were not at that time holden in much estimation, and that there was little accurate attention paid to those appearances.

Wonder is the natural product of Ignorance; and as the soil was *in such good condition* at the time of the publication of the *Seasons*, the crop was doubtless abundant. Neither individuals nor nations become corrupt all at once, nor are they enlightened in a moment. Thomson was an inspired poet, but he could not work miracles; in cases where the art of seeing had in some degree been learned, the teacher would further the proficiency of his pupils, but he could do little *more*; though so far does vanity assist men in acts of self-deception, that many would often fancy they recognized a likeness when they knew nothing of the original. Having shown that much of what his biographer deemed genuine admiration must in fact have been blind wonderment —how is the rest to be accounted for?—Thomson was fortunate in the very title of his poem, which seemed to bring it home to the prepared sympathies of every one: in the next place, notwithstanding his high powers, he writes a vicious style; and his false ornaments are exactly of that kind which would be most likely to strike the undiscerning. He likewise abounds with sentimental commonplaces, that, from the manner in which they were brought forward, bore an imposing air of novelty. In any well-used copy of the *Seasons* the book generally opens of itself with the rhapsody on love, or with one of the

stories (perhaps 'Damon and Musidora'); these also are prominent in our collections of Extracts, and are the parts of his Work which, after all, were probably most efficient in first recommending the author to general notice. Pope, repaying praises which he had received, and wishing to extol him to the highest, only styles him 'an elegant and philosophical Poet'; nor are we able to collect any unquestionable proofs that the true characteristics of Thomson's genius as an imaginative poet[1] were perceived, till the elder Warton, almost forty years after the publication of the *Seasons*, pointed them out by a note in his Essay on the *Life and Writings of Pope*. In the *Castle of Indolence* (of which Gray speaks so coldly) these characteristics were almost as conspicuously displayed, and in verse more harmonious, and diction more pure. Yet that fine poem was neglected on its appearance, and is at this day the delight only of a few!

When Thomson died, Collins breathed forth his regrets in an Elegiac Poem, in which he pronounces a poetical curse upon *him* who should regard with insensibility the place where the Poet's remains were deposited. The Poems of the mourner himself have now passed through innumerable editions, and are universally known; but if, when Collins died, the same kind of imprecation had been pronounced by a surviving admirer, small is the number whom it would not have comprehended. The notice which his poems attained during his lifetime was so small, and of course the sale so insignificant, that not long

[1] Since these observations upon Thomson were written, I have perused the second edition of his *Seasons*, and find that even *that* does not contain the most striking passages which Wharton points out for admiration; these, with other improvements, throughout the whole work, must have been added at a later period.

before his death he deemed it right to repay to the bookseller the sum which he had advanced for them, and threw the edition into the fire.

Next in importance to the *Seasons* of Thomson, though at considerable distance from that work in order of time, come the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*; collected, new-modelled, and in many instances (if such a contradiction in terms may be used) composed by the Editor, Dr. Percy. This work did not steal silently into the world, as is evident from the number of legendary tales, that appeared not long after its publication; and had been modelled, as the authors persuaded themselves, after the old Ballad. The Compilation was, however, ill suited to the then existing taste of city society; and Dr. Johnson, 'mid the little senate to which he gave laws, was not sparing in his exertions to make it an object of contempt. The critic triumphed, the legendary imitators were deservedly disregarded, and, as undeservedly, their ill-imitated models sank, in this country, into temporary neglect; while Bürger, and other able writers of Germany, were translating or imitating these Reliques, and composing, with the aid of inspiration thence derived, poems which are the delight of the German nation. Dr. Percy was so abashed by the ridicule flung upon his labours from the ignorance and insensibility of the persons with whom he lived, that, though while he was writing under a mask he had not wanted resolution to follow his genius into the regions of true simplicity and genuine pathos (as is evinced by the exquisite ballad of *Sir Cauline* and by many other pieces), yet when he appeared in his own person and character as a poetical writer, he adopted, as in the tale of the *Hermit of Warkworth*, a diction scarcely in any one of its features distinguishable from the

vague, the glossy, and unfeeling language of his day. I mention this remarkable fact [1] with regret, esteeming the genius of Dr. Percy in this kind of writing superior to that of any other man by whom in modern times it has been cultivated. That even Bürger (to whom Klopstock gave, in my hearing, a commendation which he denied to Goethe and Schiller, pronouncing him to be a genuine poet, and one of the few among the Germans whose works would last) had not the fine sensibility of Percy, might be shown from many passages, in which he has deserted his original only to go astray. For example,

> Now daye was gone, and night was come,
> And all were fast asleepe,
> All save the Lady Emeline,
> Who sate in her bowre to weepe:
>
> And soone she heard her true Love's voice
> Low whispering at the walle,
> Awake, awake, my dear Ladye,
> 'Tis I thy true-love call.

Which is thus tricked out and dilated:

> Als nun die Nacht Gebirg' und Thal
> Vermummt in Rabenschatten,
> Und Hochburgs Lampen überall
> Schon ausgeflimmert hatten,

[1] Shenstone, in his *Schoolmistress*, gives a still more remarkable instance of this timidity. On its first appearance (see D'Israeli's 2nd Series of the *Curiosities of Literature*) the Poem was accompanied with an absurd prose commentary, showing, as indeed some incongruous expressions in the text imply, that the whole was intended for burlesque. In subsequent editions, the commentary was dropped, and the People have since continued to read in seriousness, doing for the Author what he had not courage openly to venture upon for himself.

Und alles tief entschlafen war;
Doch nur das Fräulein immerdar,
Voll Fieberangst, noch wachte,
Und seinen Ritter dachte:
Da horch! Ein süsser Liebeston
Kam leis' empor geflogen.
'Ho, Trudchen, ho! Da bin ich schon!
Frisch auf! Dich angezogen!'

But from humble ballads we must ascend to heroics.

All hail, Macpherson! hail to thee, Sire of Ossian! The Phantom was begotten by the snug embrace of an impudent Highlander upon a cloud of tradition—it travelled southward, where it was greeted with acclamation, and the thin Consistence took its course through Europe, upon the breath of popular applause. The Editor of the *Reliques* had indirectly preferred a claim to the praise of invention, by not concealing that his supplementary labours were considerable! how selfish his conduct, contrasted with that of the disinterested Gael, who, like Lear, gives his kingdom away, and is content to become a pensioner upon his own issue for a beggarly pittance!—Open this far-famed Book!—I have done so at random, and the beginning of the *Epic Poem Temora*, in eight Books, presents itself. 'The blue waves of Ullin roll in light. The green hills are covered with day. Trees shake their dusky heads in the breeze. Grey torrents pour their noisy streams. Two green hills with aged oaks surround a narrow plain. The blue course of a stream is there. On its banks stood Cairbar of Atha. His spear supports the king; the red eyes of his fear are sad. Cormac rises on his soul with all his ghastly wounds.' Precious memorandums from the pocket-book of the blind Ossian!

If it be unbecoming, as I acknowledge that for the most part it is, to speak disrespectfully of Works that have enjoyed for a length of time a widely-spread reputation, without at the same time producing irrefragable proofs of their unworthiness, let me be forgiven upon this occasion.—Having had the good fortune to be born and reared in a mountainous country, from my very childhood I have felt the falsehood that pervades the volumes imposed upon the world under the name of Ossian. From what I saw with my own eyes, I knew that the imagery was spurious. In nature everything is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness. In Macpherson's work it is exactly the reverse; everything (that is not stolen) is in this manner defined, insulated, dislocated, deadened,—yet nothing distinct. It will always be so when words are substituted for things. To say that the characters never could exist, that the manners are impossible, and that a dream has more substance than the whole state of society, as there depicted, is doing nothing more than pronouncing a censure which Macpherson defied; when, with the steeps of Morven before his eyes, he could talk so familiarly of his Car-borne heroes;—of Morven, which, if one may judge from its appearance at the distance of a few miles, contains scarcely an acre of ground sufficiently accommodating for a sledge to be trailed along its surface.—Mr. Malcolm Laing has ably shown that the diction of this pretended translation is a motley assemblage from all quarters; but he is so fond of making out parallel passages as to call poor Macpherson to account for his '*ands*' and his '*buts!*' and he has weakened his argument by conducting it as if he thought that every striking resemblance was a *conscious* plagiarism. It is enough that the coincidences are too remarkable for its being

probable or possible that they could arise in different minds without communication between them. Now as the Translators of the Bible, and Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope, could not be indebted to Macpherson, it follows that he must have owed his fine feathers to them; unless we are prepared gravely to assert, with Madame de Staël, that many of the characteristic beauties of our most celebrated English Poets are derived from the ancient Fingallian; in which case the modern translator would have been but giving back to Ossian his own.—It is consistent that Lucien Buonaparte, who could censure Milton for having surrounded Satan in the infernal regions with courtly and regal splendour, should pronounce the modern Ossian to be the glory of Scotland;—a country that has produced a Dunbar, a Buchanan, a Thomson, and a Burns! These opinions are of ill omen for the Epic ambition of him who has given them to the world.

Yet, much as those pretended treasures of antiquity have been admired, they have been wholly uninfluential upon the literature of the Country. No succeeding writer appears to have caught from them a ray of inspiration; no author, in the least distinguished, has ventured formally to imitate them—except the boy, Chatterton, on their first appearance. He had perceived, from the successful trials which he himself had made in literary forgery, how few critics were able to distinguish between a real ancient medal and a counterfeit of modern manufacture; and he set himself to the work of filling a magazine with *Saxon Poems*,—counterparts of those of Ossian, as like his as one of his misty stars is to another. This incapability to amalgamate with the literature of the Island is, in my estimation, a decisive proof that the book is essentially unnatural; nor should I require any

other to demonstrate it to be a forgery, audacious as worthless.—Contrast, in this respect, the effect of Macpherson's publication with the *Reliques* of Percy, so unassuming, so modest in their pretensions!—I have already stated how much Germany is indebted to this latter work; and for our own country, its poetry has been absolutely redeemed by it. I do not think that there is an able writer in verse of the present day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to the *Reliques*; I know that it is so with my friends; and, for myself, I am happy in this occasion to make a public avowal of my own.

Dr. Johnson, more fortunate in his contempt of the labours of Macpherson than those of his modest friend, was solicited not long after to furnish Prefaces biographical and critical for the works of some of the most eminent English Poets. The booksellers took upon themselves to make the collection; they referred probably to the most popular miscellanies, and, unquestionably, to their books of accounts; and decided upon the claim of authors to be admitted into a body of the most eminent, from the familiarity of their names with the readers of that day, and by the profits, which, from the sale of his works, each had brought and was bringing to the Trade. The Editor was allowed a limited exercise of discretion, and the Authors whom he recommended are scarcely to be mentioned without a smile. We open the volume of Prefatory Lives, and to our astonishment the *first* name we find is that of Cowley!—What is become of the morning-star of English Poetry? Where is the bright Elizabethan constellation? Or, if names be more acceptable than images, where is the ever-to-be-honoured Chaucer? where is Spenser? where Sidney? and, lastly, where he, whose rights as a poet, contra-distinguished from those which he is universally

allowed to possess as a dramatist, we have vindicated,—where Shakespeare?—These, and a multitude of others not unworthy to be placed near them, their contemporaries and successors, we have *not*. But in their stead, we have (could better be expected when precedence was to be settled by an abstract of reputation at any given period made, as in this case before us?) Roscommon, and Stepney, and Phillips, and Walsh, and Smith, and Duke, and King, and Spratt —Halifax, Granville, Sheffield, Congreve, Broome, and other reputed Magnates—metrical writers utterly worthless and useless, except for occasions like the present, when their productions are referred to as evidence what a small quantity of brain is necessary to procure a considerable stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day.

As I do not mean to bring down this retrospect to our own times, it may with propriety be closed at the era of this distinguished event. From the literature of other ages and countries, proofs equally cogent might have been adduced, that the opinions announced in the former part of this Essay are founded upon truth. It was not an agreeable office, nor a prudent undertaking, to declare them; but their importance seemed to render it a duty. It may still be asked, where lies the particular relation of what has been said to these Volumes?—The question will be easily answered by the discerning Reader who is old enough to remember the taste that prevailed when some of these poems were first published, seventeen years ago; who has also observed to what degree the poetry of this Island has since that period been coloured by them; and who is further aware of the unremitting hostility with which, upon some principle or other, they have each and all been

opposed. A sketch of my own notion of the constitution of Fame has been given; and, as far as concerns myself, I have cause to be satisfied. The love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt, with which these Poems have been received, knowing, as I do, the source within my own mind, from which they have proceeded, and the labour and pains, which, when labour and pains appeared needful, have been bestowed upon them, must all, if I think consistently, be received as pledges and tokens, bearing the same general impression, though widely different in value; —they are all proofs that for the present time I have not laboured in vain; and afford assurances, more or less authentic, that the products of my industry will endure.

If there be one conclusion more forcibly pressed upon us than another by the review which has been given of the fortunes and fate of poetical Works, it is this—that every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be. This remark was long since made to me by the philosophical Friend for the separation of whose poems from my own I have previously expressed my regret. The predecessors of an original Genius of a high order will have smoothed the way for all that he has in common with them;—and much he will have in common; but, for what is peculiarly his own, he will be called upon to clear and often to shape his own road:—he will be in the condition of Hannibal among the Alps.

And where lies the real difficulty of creating that taste by which a truly original poet is to be relished? Is it in breaking the bonds of custom, in overcoming the prejudices of false refinement, and displacing the

aversions of inexperience? Or, if he labour for an object which here and elsewhere I have proposed to myself, does it consist in divesting the reader of the pride that induces him to dwell upon those points wherein men differ from each other, to the exclusion of those in which all men are alike, or the same; and in making him ashamed of the vanity that renders him insensible of the appropriate excellence which civil arrangements, less unjust than might appear, and Nature illimitable in her bounty, had conferred on men who may stand below him in the scale of society? Finally, does it lie in establishing that dominion over the spirits of readers by which they are to be humbled and humanized, in order that they may be purified and exalted?

If these ends are to be attained by the mere communication of *knowledge*, it does *not* lie here.—TASTE, I would remind the reader, like IMAGINATION, is a word which has been forced to extend its services far beyond the point to which philosophy would have confined them. It is a metaphor, taken from a *passive* sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence *not* passive,—to intellectual *acts* and *operations*. The word, Imagination, has been overstrained, from impulses honourable to mankind, to meet the demands of the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature. In the instance of Taste, the process has been reversed; and from the prevalence of dispositions at once injurious and discreditable, being no other than that selfishness which is the child of apathy,—which, as Nations decline in productive and creative power, makes them value themselves upon a presumed refinement of judging. Poverty of language is the primary cause of the use which we make of the word, Imagination; but the word, Taste, has been stretched to the sense which it

bears in modern Europe by habits of self-conceit, inducing that inversion in the order of things whereby a passive faculty is made paramount among the faculties conversant with the fine arts. Proportion and congruity, the requisite knowledge being supposed, are subjects upon which taste may be trusted; it is competent to this office—for in its intercourse with these the mind is *passive*, and is affected painfully or pleasurably as by an instinct. But the profound and the exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and the sublime;—are neither of them, accurately speaking, objects of a faculty which could ever without a sinking in the spirit of Nations have been designated by the metaphor *Taste*. And why? Because without the exertion of a co-operating *power* in the mind of the reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with either of these emotions: without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist.

Passion, it must be observed, is derived from a word which signifies *suffering*; but the connexion which suffering has with effort, with exertion, and *action*, is immediate and inseparable. How strikingly is this property of human nature exhibited by the fact that, in popular language, to be in a passion is to be angry! But,

> Anger in hasty *words* or *blows*
> Itself discharges on its foes.

To be moved, then, by a passion is to be excited, often to external, and always to internal, effort; whether for the continuance and strengthening of the passion, or for its suppression, accordingly as the course which it takes may be painful or pleasurable. If the latter, the soul must contribute to its support, or it never

becomes vivid,—and soon languishes and dies. And this brings us to the point. If every great poet with whose writings men are familiar, in the highest exercise of his genius, before he can be thoroughly enjoyed, has to call forth and to communicate *power*, this service, in a still greater degree, falls upon an original writer, at his first appearance in the world.—Of genius the only proof is, the act of doing well what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before: Of genius, in the fine arts, the only infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility, for the delight, honour, and benefit of human nature. Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown. What is all this but an advance, or a conquest, made by the soul of the poet? Is it to be supposed that the reader can make progress of this kind, like an Indian prince or general—stretched on his palanquin, and borne by his slaves? No; he is invigorated and inspirited by his leader, in order that he may exert himself; for he cannot proceed in quiescence, he cannot be carried like a dead weight. Therefore to create taste is to call forth and bestow power, of which knowledge is the effect; and *there* lies the true difficulty.

As the pathetic participates of an *animal* sensation, it might seem—that, if the springs of this emotion were genuine, all men, possessed of competent knowledge of the facts and circumstances, would be instantaneously affected. And, doubtless, in the works of every true poet will be found passages of that species of excellence which is proved by effects immediate and universal. But there are emotions of the pathetic

that are simple and direct, and others—that are complex and revolutionary; some—to which the heart yields with gentleness; others—against which it struggles with pride; these varieties are infinite as the combinations of circumstance and the constitutions of character. Remember, also, that the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts these down for his purpose; but they retain their shape and quality to him who is not capable of exerting, within his own mind, a corresponding energy. There is also a meditative, as well as a human, pathos; an enthusiastic, as well as an ordinary, sorrow; a sadness that has its seat in the depths of reason, to which the mind cannot sink gently of itself—but to which it must descend by treading the steps of thought. And for the sublime,—if we consider what are the cares that occupy the passing day, and how remote is the practice and the course of life from the sources of sublimity, in the soul of Man, can it be wondered that there is little existing preparation for a poet charged with a new mission to extend its kingdom, and to augment and spread its enjoyments.

Away, then, with the senseless iteration of the word *popular*, applied to new works in poetry, as if there were no test of excellence in this first of the fine arts but that all men should run after its productions, as if urged by an appetite, or constrained by a spell!—The qualities of writing best fitted for eager reception are either such as startle the world into attention by their audacity and extravagance; or they are chiefly of a superficial kind, lying upon the surfaces of manners; or arising out of a selection and arrangement of incidents, by which the mind is kept upon the stretch of curiosity, and the fancy amused with-

out the trouble of thought. But in everything which is to send the soul into herself, to be admonished of her weakness, or to be made conscious of her power; —wherever life and nature are described as operated upon by the creative or abstracting virtue of the imagination; wherever the instinctive wisdom of antiquity and her heroic passions uniting, in the heart of the poet, with the meditative wisdom of later ages, have produced that accord of sublimated humanity which is at once a history of the remote past and a prophetic enunciation of the remotest future, *there*, the poet must reconcile himself for a season to few and scattered hearers.—Grand thoughts (and Shakespeare must often have sighed over this truth), as they are most naturally and most fitly conceived in solitude, so can they not be brought forth in the midst of plaudits without some violation of their sanctity. Go to a silent exhibition of the productions of the sister Art, and be convinced that the qualities which dazzle at first sight, and kindle the admiration of the multitude, are essentially different from those by which permanent influence is secured. Let us not shrink from following up these principles as far as they will carry us, and conclude with observing—that there never has been a period, and perhaps never will be, in which vicious poetry, of some kind or other, has not excited more zealous admiration, and been far more generally read, than good; but this advantage attends the good, that the *individual*, as well as the species, survives from age to age; whereas, of the depraved, though the species be immortal, the individual quickly *perishes*; the object of present admiration vanishes, being supplanted by some other as easily produced; which, though no better, brings with it at least the irritation of novelty,—with adaptation, more or less skilful, to

the changing humours of the majority of those who are most at leisure to regard poetical works when they first solicit their attention.

Is it the result of the whole, that, in the opinion of the Writer, the judgement of the People is not to be respected? The thought is most injurious; and, could the charge be brought against him, he would repel it with indignation. The People have already been justified, and their eulogium pronounced by implication, when it was said, above—that, of *good* poetry, the *individual*, as well as the species, *survives*. And how does it survive but through the People? What preserves it but their intellect and their wisdom?

——Past and future, are the wings
On whose support, harmoniously conjoined,
Moves the great Spirit of human knowledge—
MS.

The voice that issues from this Spirit is that Vox Populi which the Deity inspires. Foolish must he be who can mistake for this a local acclamation, or a transitory outcry—transitory though it be for years, local though from a Nation. Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is anything of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the Public, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the People. Towards the Public, the Writer hopes that he feels as much deference as it is entitled to: but to the People, philosophically characterized, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge, so far as it exists and moves, at the present, faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his devout respect, his reverence, is due. He offers it willingly and readily; and, this done, takes leave of his Readers,

by assuring them—that, if he were not persuaded that the contents of these Volumes, and the Work to which they are subsidiary, evince something of the 'Vision and the Faculty divine'; and that, both in words and things, they will operate in their degree, to extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honour, and the benefit of human nature, notwithstanding the many happy hours which he has employed in their composition, and the manifold comforts and enjoyments they have procured to him, he would not, if a wish could do it, save them from immediate destruction;—from becoming at this moment, to the world, as a thing that had never been.

1815.

LETTER TO FRIEND OF BURNS
(James Gray, Esq., Edinburgh)
(1816)

DEAR SIR,

I have carefully perused the Review of the Life of your friend Robert Burns,[1] which you kindly transmitted to me; the author has rendered a substantial service to the poet's memory; and the annexed letters are all important to the subject. After having expressed this opinion, I shall not trouble you by commenting upon the publication; but will confine myself to the request of Mr. Gilbert Burns, that I would furnish him with my notions upon the best mode of conducting the defence of his brother's injured reputation; a favourable opportunity being now afforded him to convey his sentiments to the world, along with a republication of Dr. Currie's book, which

[1] A Review of the Life of Robert Burns, and of various criticisms on his character and writings, by Alexander Peterkin, 1814.

he is about to superintend. From the respect which I have long felt for the character of the person who has thus honoured me, and from the gratitude which, as a lover of poetry, I owe to the genius of his departed relative, I should most gladly comply with this wish; if I could hope that any suggestions of mine would be of service to the cause. But, really, I feel it a thing of much delicacy, to give advice upon this occasion, as it appears to me, mainly, not a question of opinion, or of taste, but a matter of conscience. Mr. Gilbert Burns must know, if any man living does, what his brother was; and no one will deny that he, who possesses this knowledge, is a man of unimpeachable veracity. He has already spoken to the world in contradiction of the injurious assertions that have been made, and has told why he forbore to do this on their first appearance. If it be deemed adviseable to reprint Dr. Currie's narrative, without striking out such passages as the author, if he were now alive, would probably be happy to efface, let there be notes attached to the most obnoxious of them, in which the misrepresentations may be corrected, and the exaggerations exposed. I recommend this course, if Dr. Currie's Life is to be republished as it now stands, in connexion with the poems and letters, and especially if prefixed to them; but, in my judgment, it would be best to copy the example which Mason has given in his second edition of Gray's works. There, inverting the order which had been properly adopted, when the Life and Letters were new matter, the poems are placed first; and the rest takes its place as subsidiary to them. If this were done in the intended edition of Burns's works, I should strenuously recommend, that a concise life of the poet be prefixed, from the pen of Gilbert Burns, who has already given public proof how well qualified

he is for the undertaking. I know no better model as to proportion, and the degree of detail required, nor, indeed, as to the general execution, than the life of Milton by Fenton, prefixed to many editions of the *Paradise Lost*. But a more copious narrative would be expected from a brother; and some allowance ought to be made, in this and other respects, for an expectation so natural.

In this prefatory memoir, when the author has prepared himself by reflecting, that fraternal partiality may have rendered him, in some points, not so trustworthy as others less favoured by opportunity, it will be incumbent upon him to proceed candidly and openly, as far as such a procedure will tend to restore to his brother that portion of public estimation, of which he appears to have been unjustly deprived. Nay, when we recal to mind the black things which have been written of this great man, and the frightful ones that have been insinuated against him; and, as far as the public knew, till lately, without complaint, remonstrance, or disavowal, from his nearest relatives; I am not sure that it would not be best, at this day, explicitly to declare to what degree Robert Burns had given way to pernicious habits, and, as nearly as may be, to fix the point to which his moral character had been degraded. It is a disgraceful feature of the times that this measure should be necessary; most painful to think that a *brother* should have such an office to perform. But, if Gilbert Burns be conscious that the subject will bear to be so treated, he has no choice; the duty has been imposed upon him by the errors into which the former biographer has fallen, in respect to the very principles upon which his work ought to have been conducted.

I well remember the acute sorrow with which, by my own fire-side, I first perused Dr. Currie's Narrative,

and some of the letters, particularly of those composed in the latter part of the poet's life. If my pity for Burns was extreme, this pity did not preclude a strong indignation, of which he was not the object. If, said I, it were in the power of a biographer to relate the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing *but* the truth, the friends and surviving kindred of the deceased, for the sake of general benefit to mankind, might endure that such heart-rending communication should be made to the world. But in no case is this possible; and, in the present, the opportunities of directly acquiring other than superficial knowledge have been most scanty; for the writer has barely seen the person who is the subject of his tale; nor did his avocations allow him to take the pains necessary for ascertaining what portion of the information conveyed to him was authentic. So much for facts and actions; and to what purpose relate them even were they true, if the narrative cannot be heard without extreme pain; unless they are placed in such a light, and brought forward in such order, that they shall explain their own laws, and leave the reader in as little uncertainty as the mysteries of our nature will allow, respecting the spirit from which they derived their existence, and which governed the agent? But hear on this pathetic and awful subject, the poet himself, pleading for those who have transgressed!

> One point must still be greatly dark,
> The moving *why* they do it,
> And just as lamely can ye mark
> How far, perhaps, they rue it.
>
> Who made the heart, 'tis *he* alone
> Decidedly can try us;
> He knows each chord—its various tone,
> Each spring, its various bias.

> Then at the balance let's be mute,
> We never can adjust it;
> What's done we partly may compute,
> But know not what's *resisted.*

How happened it that the recollection of this affecting passage did not check so amiable a man as Dr. Currie, while he was revealing to the world the infirmities of its author? He must have known enough of human nature to be assured that men would be eager to sit in judgment, and pronounce *decidedly* upon the guilt or innocence of Burns by his testimony; nay, that there were multitudes whose main interest in the allegations would be derived from the incitements which they found therein to undertake this presumptuous office. And where lies the collateral benefit, or what ultimate advantage can be expected, to counteract the injury that the many are thus tempted to do to their own minds; and to compensate the sorrow which must be fixed in the hearts of the considerate few, by language that proclaims so much, and provokes conjectures as unfavourable as imagination can furnish? Here, said I, being moved beyond what it would become me to express, here is a revolting account of a man of exquisite genius, and confessedly of many high moral qualities, sunk into the lowest depths of vice and misery! But the painful story, notwithstanding its minuteness, is incomplete,—in essentials it is deficient; so that the most attentive and sagacious reader cannot explain how a mind, so well established by knowledge, fell—and continued to fall, without power to prevent or retard its own ruin.

Would a bosom friend of the author, his counsellor and confessor, have told such things, if true, as this book contains? and who, but one possessed of the

intimate knowledge which none but a bosom friend can acquire, could have been justified in making these avowals? Such a one, himself a pure spirit, having accompanied, as it were, upon wings, the pilgrim along the sorrowful road which he trod on foot; such a one, neither hurried down by its slippery descents, nor entangled among its thorns, nor perplexed by its windings, nor discomfited by its founderous passages — for the instruction of others—might have delineated, almost as in a map, the way which the afflicted pilgrim had pursued till the sad close of his diversified journey. In this manner the venerable spirit of Isaac Walton was qualified to have retraced the unsteady course of a highly-gifted man, who, in this lamentable point, and in versatility of genius, bore no unobvious resemblance to the Scottish bard; I mean his friend Corron—whom, notwithstanding all that the sage must have disapproved in his life, he honoured with the title of son. Nothing like this, however, has the biographer of Burns accomplished; and, with his means of information, copious as in some respects they were, it would have been absurd to attempt it. The only motive, therefore, which could authorize the writing and publishing matter so distressing to read is wanting!

Nor is Dr. Currie's performance censurable from these considerations alone; for information, which would have been of absolute worth if in his capacity of biographer and editor he had known when to stop short, is rendered unsatisfactory and inefficacious through the absence of this reserve, and from being coupled with statements of improbable and irreconcileable facts. We have the author's letters discharged upon us in showers; but how few readers will take the trouble of comparing those letters with each other, and with the other documents of the publication, in

order to come at a genuine knowledge of the writer's character!—The life of Johnson by Boswell had broken through many pre-existing delicacies, and afforded the British public an opportunity of acquiring experience, which before it had happily wanted; nevertheless, at the time when the ill-selected medley of Burns's correspondence first appeared, little progress had been made (nor is it likely that, by the mass of mankind, much ever will be made) in determining what portion of these confidential communications escapes the pen in courteous, yet often innocent, compliance—to gratify the several tastes of correspondents; and as little towards distinguishing opinions and sentiments uttered for the momentary amusement merely of the writer's own fancy, from those which his judgment deliberately approves, and his heart faithfully cherishes. But the subject of this book was a man of extraordinary genius; whose birth, education, and employments had placed and kept him in a situation far below that in which the writers and readers of expensive volumes are usually found. Critics upon works of fiction have laid it down as a rule that remoteness of place, in fixing the choice of a subject, and in prescribing the mode of treating it, is equal in effect to distance of time;—restraints may be thrown off accordingly. Judge then of the delusions which artificial distinctions impose, when to a man like Doctor Currie, writing with views so honourable, the *social condition* of the individual of whom he was treating, could seem to place him at such a distance from the exalted reader, that ceremony might be discarded with him, and his memory sacrificed, as it were, almost without compunction. The poet was laid where these injuries could not reach him; but he had a parent, I understand, an admirable woman, still surviving; a brother like Gilbert Burns!—a widow estimable for her vir-

tues; and children, at that time infants, with the world before them, which they must face to obtain a maintenance; who remembered their father probably with the tenderest affection;—and whose opening minds, as their years advanced, would become conscious of so many reasons for admiring him.—Ill-fated child of nature, too frequently thine own enemy,—unhappy favourite of genius, too often misguided,—this is indeed to be 'crushed beneath the furrow's weight!'

Why, sir, do I write to you at this length, when all that I had to express in direct answer to the request, which occasioned this letter, lay in such narrow compass?—Because having entered upon the subject, I am unable to quit it!—Your feelings, I trust, go along with mine; and, rising from this individual case to a general view of the subject, you will probably agree with me in opinion that biography, though differing in some essentials from works of fiction, is nevertheless, like them, an *art*,—an art, the laws of which are determined by the imperfections of our nature, and the constitution of society. Truth is not here, as in the sciences, and in natural philosophy, to be sought without scruple, and promulgated for its own sake, upon the mere chance of its being serviceable; but only for obviously justifying purposes, moral or intellectual.

Silence is a privilege of the grave, a right of the departed: let him, therefore, who infringes that right, by speaking publicly of, for, or against, those who cannot speak for themselves, take heed that he opens not his mouth without a sufficient sanction. De mortuis nil nisi bonum, is a rule in which these sentiments have been pushed to an extreme that proves how deeply humanity is interested in maintaining them. And it was wise to announce the precept thus

absolutely; both because there exist in that same nature, by which it has been dictated, so many temptations to disregard it,—and because there are powers and influences, within and without us, that will prevent its being literally fulfilled—to the suppression of profitable truth. Penalties of law, conventions of manners, and personal fear, protect the reputation of the living; and something of this protection is extended to the recently dead,—who survive, to a certain degree, in their kindred and friends. Few are so insensible as not to feel this, and not to be actuated by the feeling. But only to philosophy enlightened by the affections does it belong justly to estimate the claims of the deceased on the one hand, and of the present age and future generations, on the other; and to strike a balance between them.—Such philosophy runs a risk of becoming extinct among us, if the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life, to which we have lately been more and more accustomed, are to be regarded as indications of a vigorous state of public feeling favourable to the maintenance of the liberties of our country.—Intelligent lovers of freedom are from necessity bold and hardy lovers of truth; but, according to the measure in which their love is intelligent, is it attended with a finer discrimination, and a more sensitive delicacy. The wise and good (and all others being lovers of licence rather than of liberty are in fact slaves) respect, as one of the noblest characteristics of Englishmen, that jealousy of familiar approach, which, while it contributes to the maintenance of private dignity, is one of the most efficacious guardians of rational public freedom.

The general obligation upon which I have insisted, is especially binding upon those who undertake the

biography of *authors*. Assuredly, there is no cause why the lives of that class of men should be pried into with the same diligent curiosity, and laid open with the same disregard of reserve, which may sometimes be expedient in composing the history of men who have borne an active part in the world. Such thorough knowledge of the good and bad qualities of these latter, as can only be obtained by a scrutiny of their private lives, conduces to explain not only their own public conduct, but that of those with whom they have acted. Nothing of this applies to authors, considered merely as authors. Our business is with their books,—to understand and to enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true—that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished. It should seem that the ancients thought in this manner; for of the eminent Greek and Roman poets, few and scanty memorials were, I believe, ever prepared; and fewer still are preserved. It is delightful to read what, in the happy exercise of his own genius, Horace chooses to communicate of himself and his friends; but I confess I am not so much a lover of knowledge, independent of its quality, as to make it likely that it would much rejoice me, were I to hear that records of the Sabine poet and his contemporaries, composed upon the Boswellian plan, had been unearthed among the ruins of Herculaneum. You will interpret what I am writing, *liberally*. With respect to the light which such a discovery might throw upon Roman manners, there would be reasons to desire it: but I should dread to disfigure the beautiful ideal of the memories of those illustrious persons with incongruous features, and to sully the imaginative purity of their classical works with gross and trivial recollections. The least weighty objection

to heterogeneous details, is that they are mainly superfluous, and therefore an incumbrance.

But you will perhaps accuse me of refining too much; and it is, I own, comparatively of little importance, while we are engaged in reading the *Iliad*, the *Eneid*, the tragedies of *Othello* and *King Lear*, whether the authors of these poems were good or bad men; whether they lived happily or miserably. Should a thought of the kind cross our minds, there would be no doubt, if irresistible external evidence did not decide the question unfavourably, that men of such transcendant genius were both good and happy: and if, unfortunately, it had been on record that they were otherwise, sympathy with the fate of their fictitious personages would banish the unwelcome truth whenever it obtruded itself, so that it would but slightly disturb our pleasure. Far otherwise is it with that class of poets, the principal charm of whose writings depends upon the familiar knowledge which they convey of the personal feelings of their authors. This is eminently the case with the effusions of Burns;—in the small quantity of narrative that he has given, he himself bears no inconsiderable part; and he has produced no drama. Neither the subjects of his poems, nor his manner of handling them, allow us long to forget their author. On the basis of his human character he has reared a poetic one, which with more or less distinctness presents itself to view in almost every part of his earlier, and, in my estimation, his most valuable verses. This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual:—and though the materials, in some parts, are coarse, and the disposition is often fantastic and irregular, yet the whole is agreeable and strikingly attractive. Plague, then, upon your remorseless hunters after matter of fact

(who, after all, rank among the blindest of human beings) when they would convince you that the foundations of this admirable edifice are hollow; and that its frame is unsound! Granting that all which has been raked up to the prejudice of Burns were literally true; and that it added, which it does not, to our better understanding of human nature and human life (for that genius is not incompatible with vice, and that vice leads to misery—the more acute from the sensibilities which are the elements of genius —we needed not those communications to inform us) how poor would have been the compensation for the deduction made, by this extrinsic knowledge, from the intrinsic efficacy of his poetry—to please, and to instruct!

In illustration of this sentiment, permit me to remind you that it is the privilege of poetic genius to catch, under certain restrictions of which perhaps at the time of its being exerted it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found, —in the walks of nature, and in the business of men.—The poet, trusting to primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war: nor does he shrink from the company of the passion of love though immoderate—from convivial pleasure though intemperate—nor from the presence of war though savage, and recognized as the handmaid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature; both with reference to himself and in describing the condition of others. Who, but some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exaltation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o' Shanter? The poet fears not to tell the reader in

the outset that his hero was a desperate and sottish drunkard, whose excesses were frequent as his opportunities. This reprobate sits down to his cups, while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion;—the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise—laughter and jest thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate—conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence—selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality—and, while these various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within.—I pity him who cannot perceive that, in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.

> Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
> O'er a' the *ills* of life victorious.

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in this scene, and of those who resemble him!—Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve! The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled with exquisite skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling, that often bind these beings to practices productive of so much unhappiness to themselves, and to those whom it is their duty to cherish;—and, as far as he puts the reader into possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary influence over the minds of those who are thus deplorably enslaved.

Not less successfully does Burns avail himself of his own character and situation in society, to con-

struct out of them a poetic self,—introduced as a dramatic personage—for the purpose of inspiriting his incidents, diversifying his pictures, recommending his opinions, and giving point to his sentiments. His brother can set me right if I am mistaken when I express a belief that, at the time when he wrote his story of *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, he had very rarely been intoxicated, or perhaps even much exhilarated by liquor. Yet how happily does he lead his reader into that track of sensations! and with what lively humour does he describe the disorder of his senses and the confusion of his understanding, put to test by a deliberate attempt to count the horns of the moon!

> But whether she had three or four
> He could na' tell.

Behold a sudden apparition that disperses this disorder, and in a moment chills him into possession of himself! Coming upon no more important mission than the grisly phantom was charged with, what mode of introduction could have been more efficient or appropriate?

But, in those early poems, through the veil of assumed habits and pretended qualities, enough of the real man appears to shew that he was conscious of sufficient cause to dread his own passions, and to bewail his errors! We have rejected as false sometimes in the letter, and of necessity as false in the spirit, many of the testimonies that others have borne against him;—but, by his own hand—in words the import of which cannot be mistaken—it has been recorded that the order of his life but faintly corresponded with the clearness of his views. It is probable that he would have proved a still greater poet if, by strength of reason, he could have controlled the

propensities which his sensibility engendered; but he would have been a poet of a different class: and certain it is, had that desirable restraint been early established, many peculiar beauties which enrich his verses could never have existed, and many accessary influences, which contribute greatly to their effect, would have been wanting. For instance, the momentous truth of the passage already quoted, 'One point must still be greatly dark,' &c. could not possibly have been conveyed with such pathetic force by any poet that ever lived, speaking in his own voice; unless it were felt that, like Burns, he was a man who preached from the text of his own errors; and whose wisdom, beautiful as a flower that might have risen from seed sown from above, was in fact a scion from the root of personal suffering. Whom did the poet intend should be thought of as occupying that grave over which, after modestly setting forth the moral discernment and warm affections of its 'poor inhabitant', it is supposed to be inscribed that

> ——Thoughtless follies laid him low,
> And stained his name.

Who but himself,—himself anticipating the too probable termination of his own course? Here is a sincere and solemn avowal—a public declaration *from his own will*—a confession at once devout, poetical, and human—a history in the shape of a prophecy! What more was required of the biographer than to have put his seal to the writing, testifying that the foreboding had been realized, and that the record was authentic?—Lastingly is it to be regretted in respect to this memorable being, that inconsiderate intrusion has not left us at liberty to enjoy his mirth, or his love; his wisdom or his wit; without an admixture of useless, irksome, and painful details, that

take from his poems so much of that right—which, with all his carelessness, and frequent breaches of self-respect, he was not negligent to maintain for them—the right of imparting solid instruction through the medium of unalloyed pleasure.

You will have noticed that my observations have hitherto been confined to Dr. Currie's book: if, by fraternal piety, the poison can be sucked out of this wound, those inflicted by meaner hands may be safely left to heal of themselves. Of the other writers who have given their names, only one lays claim to even a slight acquaintance with the author, whose moral character they take upon them publicly to anatomize. The Edinburgh reviewer—and him I single out because the author of the vindication of Burns has treated his offences with comparative indulgence, to which he has no claim, and which, from whatever cause it might arise, has interfered with the dispensation of justice—the Edinburgh reviewer thus writes:[1] 'The *leading vice* in Burns's character, and the *cardinal deformity*, indeed, of ALL his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity, and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility: his belief, in short, in the dispensing power of genius and social feeling in all matters of morality and common sense'; adding, that these vices and erroneous notions 'have communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality at once contemptible and hateful'. We are afterwards told, that he is *perpetually* making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability, and imprudence; and, in the next paragraph, that he is *perpetually* doing something

[1] From Mr. Peterkin's pamphlet, who vouches for the accuracy of his citations; omitting, however, to apologize for their length.

else; i. e. 'boasting of his own independence'.—Marvellous address in the commission of faults! not less than Cæsar shewed in the management of business; who, it is said, could dictate to three secretaries upon three several affairs, at one and the same moment! But, to be serious. When a man, self-elected into the office of a public judge of the literature and life of his contemporaries, can have the audacity to go these lengths in framing a summary of the contents of volumes that are scattered over every quarter in the globe, and extant in almost every cottage of Scotland, to give the lie to his labours; we must not wonder if, in the plenitude of his concern for the interests of abstract morality, the infatuated slanderer should have found no obstacle to prevent him from insinuating that the poet, whose writings are to this degree stained and disfigured, was 'one of the sons of fancy and of song, who spend in vain superfluities the money that belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesman and his famishing infants; and who rave about friendship and philosophy in a tavern, while their wives' hearts,' &c. &c.

It is notorious that this persevering Aristarch [1], as often as a work of original genius comes before him, avails himself of that opportunity to re-proclaim to the world the narrow range of his own comprehension. The happy self-complacency, the unsuspecting vainglory, and the cordial *bonhommie*, with which this part of his duty is performed, do not leave him free

[1] A friend, who chances to be present while the author is correcting the proof-sheets, observes that Aristarchus is libelled by this application of his name, and advises that 'Zoilus' should be substituted. The question lies between spite and presumption; and it is not easy to decide upon a case where the claims of each party are so strong; but the name of Aristarch, who, simple man! would allow no verse to pass for Homer's which he did not approve of, is retained, for reasons that will be deemed cogent.

to complain of being hardly dealt with if any one should declare the truth, by pronouncing much of the foregoing attack upon the intellectual and moral character of Burns, to be the trespass (for reasons that will shortly appear, it cannot be called the venial trespass) of a mind obtuse, superficial, and inept. What portion of malignity such a mind is susceptible of, the judicious admirers of the poet, and the discerning friends of the man, will not trouble themselves to enquire; but they will wish that this evil principle had possessed more sway than they are at liberty to assign to it: the offender's condition would not then have been so hopeless. For malignity *selects* its diet; but where is to be found the nourishment from which vanity will revolt? Malignity may be appeased by triumphs real or supposed, and will then sleep, or yield its place to a repentance producing dispositions of good will, and desires to make amends for past injury; but vanity is restless, reckless, intractable, unappeasable, insatiable. Fortunate is it for the world when this spirit incites only to actions that meet with an adequate punishment in derision; such, as in a scheme of poetical justice, would be aptly requited by assigning to the agents, when they quit this lower world, a station in that not uncomfortable limbo—the Paradise of Fools! But, assuredly, we shall have here another proof that ridicule is not the test of truth, if it prevent us from perceiving, that *depravity* has no ally more active, more inveterate, nor, from the difficulty of divining to what kind and degree of extravagance it may prompt, more pernicious than self-conceit. Where this alliance is too obvious to be disputed, the culprit ought not to be allowed the benefit of contempt—as a shelter from detestation; much less should he be permitted to plead, in excuse for his transgressions, that especial

malevolence had little or no part in them. It is not recorded, that the ancient, who set fire to the temple of Diana, had a particular dislike to the goddess of chastity, or held idolatry in abhorrence: he was a fool, an egregious fool, but not the less, on that account, a most odious monster. The tyrant who is described as having rattled his chariot along a bridge of brass over the heads of his subjects, was, no doubt, inwardly laughed at; but what if this mock Jupiter, not satisfied with an empty noise of his own making, had amused himself with throwing firebrands upon the house-tops, as a substitute for lightning; and, from his elevation, had hurled stones upon the heads of his people, to shew that he was a master of the destructive bolt, as well as of the harmless voice of the thunder!—The lovers of all that is honourable to humanity have recently had occasion to rejoice over the downfall of an intoxicated despot, whose vagaries furnish more solid materials by which the philosopher will exemplify how strict is the connection between the ludicrously, and the terribly fantastic. We know, also, that Robespierre was one of the vainest men that the most vain country upon earth has produced;—and from this passion, and from that cowardice which naturally connects itself with it, flowed the horrors of his administration. It is a descent, which I fear you will scarcely pardon, to compare these redoubtable enemies of mankind with the anonymous conductor of a perishable publication. But the moving spirit is the same in them all; and, as far as difference of circumstances, and disparity of powers, will allow, manifests itself in the same way; by professions of reverence for truth, and concern for duty—carried to the giddiest heights of ostentation, while practice seems to have no other reliance than on the omnipotence of falshood.

The transition from a vindication of Robert Burns to these hints for a picture of the intellectual deformity of one who has grossly outraged his memory, is too natural to require an apology; but I feel, sir, that I stand in need of indulgence for having detained you so long. Let me beg that you would impart to any judicious friends of the poet as much of the contents of these pages as you think will be serviceable to the cause; but do not give publicity to any *portion* of them, unless it be thought probable that an open circulation of the whole may be useful.[1] The subject is delicate, and some of the opinions are of a kind, which, if torn away from the trunk that supports them, will be apt to wither, and, in that state, to contract poisonous qualities; like the branches of the yew, which, while united by a living spirit to their native tree, are neither noxious, nor without beauty; but, being dissevered and cast upon the ground, become deadly to the cattle that incautiously feed upon them.

To Mr. Gilbert Burns, especially, let my sentiments be conveyed, with my sincere respects, and best wishes for the success of his praise-worthy enterprise. And if, through modest apprehension, he should doubt of his own ability to do justice to his brother's memory, let him take encouragement from the assurance that the most odious part of the charges owed its credit to the silence of those who were deemed best entitled to speak; and who, it was thought, would not have been mute, had they believed that they could speak beneficially. Moreover, it may be relied on as a general truth, which will not escape his recollection, that tasks of this kind are not so arduous as, to those who are tenderly concerned in

[1] It was deemed that it would be so, and the letter is published accordingly.

their issue, they may at first appear to be; for, if the many be hasty to condemn, there is a re-action of generosity which stimulates them—when forcibly summoned—to redress the wrong; and, for the sensible part of mankind, *they* are neither dull to understand, nor slow to make allowance for, the aberrations of men, whose intellectual powers do honour to their species.

I am, dear Sir, respectfully yours,

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

Rydal Mount, January, 1816.

LETTER TO SOUTHEY (1)

(1816)

MY DEAR SOUTHEY,

I am much of your mind in respect to my Ode. Had it been a hymn, uttering the sentiments of a *multitude*, a *stanza* would have been indispensable. But though I have called it a *Thanksgiving Ode*, strictly speaking, it is not so, but a poem, composed, or supposed to be composed, on the morning of the thanksgiving, uttering the sentiments of an *individual* upon that occasion. It is a *dramatized ejaculation;* and this, if any thing can, must excuse the irregular frame of the metre. In respect to a *stanza* for a grand subject designed to be treated comprehensively, there are great objections. If the stanza be short, it will scarcely allow of fervour and impetuosity, unless so short, as that the sense is run perpetually from one stanza to another, as in Horace's Alcaics; and if it be long, it will be as apt to generate diffuseness as to check it. Of this we have innumerable instances in Spenser and the Italian poets. The sense required

cannot be included in one given stanza, so that another whole stanza is added, not unfrequently, for the sake of matter which would naturally include itself in a very few lines.

If Gray's plan be adopted, there is not time to become acquainted with the arrangement, and to recognize with pleasure the recurrence of the movement.

Be so good as to let me know where you found most difficulty in following me. The passage which I most suspect of being misunderstood is,

> And thus is missed the sole true glory;

and the passage, where I doubt most about the reasonableness of expecting that the reader should follow me in the luxuriance of the imagery and the language, is the one that describes, under so many metaphors, the spreading of the news of the Waterloo victory over the globe. Tell me if this displeased you.

Do you know who reviewed *The White Doe*, in the *Quarterly?* After having asserted that Mr. W. uses his words without any regard to their sense, the writer says, that on no other principle can he explain that Emily is *always* called 'the consecrated Emily'. Now, the name Emily occurs just fifteen times in the poem; and out of these fifteen, the epithet is attached to it *once*, and that for the express purpose of recalling the scene in which she had been consecrated by her brother's solemn adjuration, that she would fulfil her destiny, and become a soul,

> By force of sorrows high
> Uplifted to the purest sky
> Of undisturbed mortality.

The point upon which the whole moral interest of

the piece hinges, when that speech is closed, occurs in this line,

He kissed the consecrated maid;

and to bring back this to the reader, I repeated the epithet.

The service I have lately rendered to Burns' genius, will one day be performed to mine. The quotations, also, are printed with the most culpable neglect of correctness: there are lines turned into nonsense. Too much of this. Farewell!

Believe me affectionately yours,

W. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO SOUTHEY (2)

(UNDATED)

Dear Southey,

. . . . . .

My opinion in respect to *epic poetry* is much the same as the critic whom Lucien Buonaparte has quoted in his preface. *Epic* poetry, of the highest class, requires in the first place an action eminently influential, an action with a grand or sublime train of consequences; it next requires the intervention and guidance of beings superior to man, what the critics I believe call *machinery*; and, lastly, I think with Dennis, that no subject but a religious one can answer the demand of the soul in the highest class of this species of poetry. Now Tasso's is a religious subject, and in my opinion, a most happy one; but I am confidently of opinion that the *movement* of Tasso's poem rarely corresponds with the essential character of the subject; nor do I think it possible that written in *stanzas* it should. The celestial movement cannot, I think, be kept up, if the sense is to be

broken in that despotic manner at the close of every eight lines. Spenser's stanza is infinitely finer than the *ottava rhima*, but even Spenser's will not allow the epic movement as exhibited by Homer, Virgil, and Milton. How noble is the first paragraph of the *Aeneid* in point of sound, compared with the first stanza of the *Jerusalem Delivered!* The one winds with the majesty of the Conscript Fathers entering the Senate House in solemn procession ; and the other has the pace of a set of recruits shuffling on the drill-ground, and receiving from the adjutant or drill-serjeant the command to halt at every ten or twenty steps. Farewell.

Affectionately yours,
W. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO FRIEND ON MONUMENTS TO LITERARY MEN

(1819)

Rydal Mount, April 21, 1819.

Sir,

The letter with which you have honoured me, bearing date the thirty-first of March, I did not receive until yesterday ; and, therefore, could not earlier express my regret that, notwithstanding a cordial approbation of the feeling which has prompted the undertaking, and a genuine sympathy in admiration with the gentlemen who have subscribed towards a Monument for Burns, I cannot unite my humble efforts with theirs in promoting this object.

Sincerely can I affirm that my respect for the motives which have swayed these gentlemen has

urged me to trouble you with a brief statement of the reasons of my dissent.

In the first place: Eminent poets appear to me to be a class of men, who less than any others stand in need of such marks of distinction; and hence I infer, that this mode of acknowledging their merits is one for which they would not, in general, be themselves solicitous. Burns did, indeed, erect a monument to Ferguson; but I apprehend his gratitude took this course because he felt that Ferguson had been prematurely cut off, and that his fame bore no proportion to his deserts. In neither of these particulars can the fate of Burns justly be said to resemble that of his predecessor: his years were indeed few, but numerous enough to allow him to spread his name far and wide, and to take permanent root in the affections of his countrymen; in short, he has raised for himself a monument so conspicuous, and of such imperishable materials, as to render a local fabric of stone superfluous, and, therefore, comparatively insignificant.

But why, if this be granted, should not his fond admirers be permitted to indulge their feelings, and at the same time to embellish the metropolis of Scotland? If this may be justly objected to, and in my opinion it may, it is because the showy tributes to genius are apt to draw off attention from those efforts by which the interests of literature might be substantially promoted; and to exhaust public spirit in comparatively unprofitable exertions, when the wrongs of literary men are crying out for redress on all sides. It appears to me, that towards no class of his Majesty's subjects are the laws so unjust and oppressive. The attention of Parliament has lately been directed, by petition, to the exaction of copies of newly published works for certain libraries; but

this is a trifling evil compared with the restrictions imposed upon the duration of copyright, which, in respect to works profound in philosophy, or elevated, abstracted, and refined in imagination, is tantamount almost to an exclusion of the author from all pecuniary recompence; and, even where works of imagination and manners are so constituted as to be adapted to immediate demand, as is the case of those of Burns, justly may it be asked, what reason can be assigned that an author who dies young should have the prospect before him of his children being left to languish in poverty and dependence, while booksellers are revelling in luxury upon gains derived from works which are the delight of many nations.

This subject might be carried much further, and we might ask, if the course of things insured immediate wealth, and accompanying rank and honours—honours and wealth often entailed on their families to men distinguished in the other learned professions, —why the laws should interfere to take away those pecuniary emoluments which are the natural inheritance of the posterity of authors, whose pursuits, if directed by genius and sustained by industry, yield in importance to none in which the members of a community can be engaged?

But to recur to the proposal in your letter. I would readily assist, according to my means, in erecting a monument to the memory of the Poet Chatterton, who, with transcendent genius, was cut off while he was yet a boy in years; this, could he have anticipated the tribute, might have soothed his troubled spirit, as an expression of general belief in the existence of those powers which he was too impatient and too proud to develope. At all events, it might prove an awful and a profitable warning. I should also be glad to see a monument

erected on the banks of Loch Leven to the memory of the innocent and tender-hearted Michael Bruce, who, after a short life, spent in poverty and obscurity, was called away too early to have left behind him more than a few trustworthy promises of pure affections and unvitiated imagination.

Let the gallant defenders of our country be liberally rewarded with monuments; their noble actions cannot speak for themselves, as the writings of men of genius are able to do. Gratitude in respect to them stands in need of admonition; and the very multitude of heroic competitors which increases the demand for this sentiment towards our naval and military defenders, considered as a body, is injurious to the claims of individuals. Let our great statesmen and eminent lawyers, our learned and eloquent divines, and they who have successfully devoted themselves to the abstruser sciences, be rewarded in like manner; but towards departed genius, exerted in the fine arts, and more especially in poetry, I humbly think, in the present state of things, the sense of our obligation to it may more satisfactorily be expressed by means pointing directly to the general benefit of literature.

Trusting that these opinions of an individual will be candidly interpreted, I have the honour to be

Your obedient servant,

W. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO LORD LONSDALE

(1829)

Feb. 5, [1829].

My Lord,

I am truly obliged by your friendly and frank communication. May I beg that you would add to

the favour, by marking with a pencil some of the passages that are faulty, in your view of the case? We seem pretty much of opinion upon the subject of rhyme. Pentameters, where the sense has a close of some sort at every two lines, may be rendered in regularly closed couplets; but hexameters (especially the Virgilian, that run the lines into each other for a great length) cannot. I have long been persuaded that Milton formed his blank verse upon the model of the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, and I am so much struck with this resemblance, that I should have attempted Virgil in blank verse, had I not been persuaded that no ancient author can be with advantage so rendered. Their religion, their warfare, their course of action and feeling, are too remote from modern interest to allow it. We require every possible help and attraction of sound, in our language, to smooth the way for the admission of things so remote from our present concerns. My own notion of translation is, that it cannot be too literal, provided three faults be avoided: *baldness*, in which I include all that takes from dignity; and *strangeness*, or *uncouthness*, including harshness; and lastly, attempts to convey meanings which, as they cannot be given but by languid circumlocutions, cannot in fact be said to be given at all. I will trouble you with an instance in which I fear this fault exists. Virgil, describing Aeneas's voyage, third book, verse 551, says—

> Hinc sinus Herculei, si vera est fama, Tarenti
> Cernitur.

I render it thus:

> Hence we behold the bay that bears the name
> Of proud Tarentum, proud to share the fame
> Of Hercules, though by a dubious claim.

I was unable to get the meaning with tolerable harmony into fewer words, which are more than to a modern reader, perhaps, it is worth.

I feel much at a loss, without the assistance of the marks which I have requested, to take an exact measure of your Lordship's feelings with regard to the diction. To save you the trouble of reference, I will transcribe two passages from Dryden; first, the celebrated appearance of Hector's ghost to Aeneas. Aeneas thus addresses him:

O light of Trojans and support of Troy,
Thy father's champion, and thy country's joy,
O long expected by thy friends, from whence
Art thou returned, so late for our defence?
Do we behold thee, wearied as we are
With length of labours and with toils of war?
After so many funerals of thy own,
Art thou restored to thy declining town?

This I think not an unfavourable specimen of Dryden's way of treating the solemnly pathetic passages. Yet, surely, here is *nothing* of the *cadence* of the original, and little of its spirit. The second verse is not in the original, and ought not to have been in Dryden; for it anticipates the beautiful hemistich,

Sat patriae Priamoque datum.

By the by, there is the same sort of anticipation in a spirited and harmonious couplet preceding:

Such as he was when by *Pelides slain*
Thessalian coursers dragged him o'er the plain.

This introduction of Pelides here is not in Virgil, because it would have prevented the effect of

Redit exuvias indutus Achillei.

There is a striking solemnity in the answer of Pantheus to Aeneas:

Venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus
Dardaniae: fuimus Troës, fuit Ilium, et ingens
Gloria Teucrorum, &c.

Dryden thus gives it:

Then Pantheus, with a groan,
Troy is no more, and Ilium was a town.
The fatal day, the appointed hour is come
When wrathful Jove's irrevocable doom
Transfers the Trojan state to Grecian hands.
The fire consumes the town, the foe commands.

My own translation runs thus; and I quote it because it occurred to my mind immediately on reading your Lordship's observations:

'Tis come, the final hour,
Th' inevitable close of Dardan power
Hath come! we *have* been Trojans, Ilium *was*,
And the great name of Troy; now all things pass
To Argos. So wills angry Jupiter,
Amid a burning town the Grecians domineer.

I cannot say that '*we have been*', and '*Ilium was*', are as sonorous sounds as '*fuimus*', and '*fuit*'; but these latter must have been as familiar to the Romans as the former to ourselves. I should much like to know if your Lordship disapproves of my translation here. I have one word to say upon ornament. It was my wish and labour that my translation should have far more of the *genuine* ornaments of Virgil than my predecessors. Dryden has been very careful of these, and profuse of his own, which seem to me very rarely to harmonize with those of Virgil; as,

for example, describing Hector's appearance in the passage above alluded to,

> A *bloody shroud*, he seemed, and *bath'd* in tears.
> I wept to see the *visionary* man.

Again,

> And all the wounds he for his country bore
> Now streamed afresh, and with *new purple ran.*

I feel it, however, to be too probable that my translation is deficient in ornament, because I must unavoidably have lost many of Virgil's, and have never without reluctance attempted a compensation of my own. Had I taken the liberties of my predecessors, Dryden especially, I could have translated nine books with the labour that three have cost me. The third book, being of a humbler character than either of the former, I have treated with rather less scrupulous apprehension, and have interwoven a little of my own; and, with permission, I will send it, ere long, for the benefit of your Lordship's observations, which really will be of great service to me if I proceed. Had I begun the work fifteen years ago, I should have finished it with pleasure; at present, I fear it will take more time than I either can or ought to spare. I do not think of going beyond the fourth book.

As to the MS., be so kind as to forward it at your leisure to me, at Sir George Beaumont's, Coleorton Hall, near Ashby, whither I am going in about ten days. May I trouble your Lordship with our respectful compliments to Lady Lonsdale?

Believe [me] ever
Your Lordship's faithful
And obliged friend and servant,
Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO DYCE

(Jan. 1829)

Rydal Mount, Kendal, Jan. 12, 1829.

Dear Sir,

I regret to hear of the indisposition from which you have been suffering.

That you are convinced gives me great pleasure, as I hope that every other editor of Collins will follow your example. You are at perfect liberty to declare that you have rejected Bell's copy in consequence of my opinion of it; and I feel much satisfaction in being the instrument of rescuing the memory of Collins from this disgrace. I have always felt some concern that Mr. Home, who lived several years after Bell's publication, did not testify more regard for his deceased friend's memory by protesting against this imposition. Mr. Mackenzie is still living; and I shall shortly have his opinion upon the question; and if it be at all interesting, I shall take the liberty of sending it to you.

Dyer is another of our minor poets—minor as to quantity—of whom one would wish to know more. Particulars about him might still be collected, I should think, in South Wales, his native country, and where in early life he practised as a painter. I have often heard Sir George Beaumont express a curiosity about his pictures, and a wish to see any specimen of his pencil that might survive. If you are a rambler, perhaps you may, at some time or other, be led into Carmarthenshire, and might bear in mind what I have just said of this excellent author.

I had once a hope to have learned some unknown particulars of Thomson, about Jedburgh, but I was disappointed. Had I succeeded, I meant to publish a short life of him, prefixed to a volume containing *The Seasons*, *The Castle of Indolence*, his minor pieces in rhyme, and a few extracts from his plays, and his *Liberty*; and I feel still inclined to do something of the kind. These three writers, Thomson, Collins, and Dyer, had more poetic imagination than any of their contemporaries, unless we reckon Chatterton as of that age. I do not name Pope, for he stands alone, as a man most highly gifted; but unluckily he took the plain when the heights were within his reach.

Excuse this long letter, and believe me

Sincerely yours,

Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO DYCE

(Oct. 1829)

Rydal Mount, Kendal, Oct. 16, 1829.

My dear Sir,

On my return from Ireland, where I have been travelling a few weeks, I found your present of George Peele's works, and the obliging letter accompanying it; for both of which I offer my cordial thanks.

English literature is greatly indebted to your labours; and I have much pleasure in this occasion of testifying my respect for the sound judgment and conscientious diligence with which you discharge your duty as an editor. Peele's works were well

deserving of the care you have bestowed upon them; and, as I did not previously possess a copy of any part of them, the beautiful book which you have sent me was very acceptable.

By accident, I learned lately that you had made a Book of Extracts, which I had long wished for opportunity and industry to execute myself. I am happy it has fallen into so much better hands. I allude to your *Selections from the Poetry of English Ladies.* I had only a glance at your work; but I will take this opportunity of saying, that should a second edition be called for, I should be pleased with the honour of being consulted by you about it. There is one poetess to whose writings I am especially partial, the Countess of Winchelsea. I have perused her poems frequently, and should be happy to name such passages as I think most characteristic of her genius, and most fit to be selected.

I know not what to say about my intended edition of a portion of Thomson. There appears to be some indelicacy in one poet treating another in that way. The example is not good, though I think there are few to whom the process might be more advantageously applied than to Thomson. Yet, so sensible am I of the objection, that I should not have entertained the thought, but for the expectation held out to me by an acquaintance, that valuable materials for a new Life of Thomson might be procured. In this I was disappointed.

With much respect, I remain, dear Sir,
Sincerely yours,
Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO DYCE

(May, 1830)

[*No date, but Postmark,* 1830.]

I am truly obliged, my dear Sir, by your valuable present of Webster's *Dramatic Works* and the *Specimens*. Your publisher was right in insisting upon the whole of Webster, otherwise the book might have been superseded, either by an entire edition separately given to the world, or in some *corpus* of the dramatic writers. The poetic genius of England, with the exception of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Pope, and a very few more, is to be sought in her drama. How it grieves one that there is so little probability of those valuable authors being read except by the curious! I questioned my friend Charles Lamb whether it would answer for some person of real taste to undertake abridging the plays that are not likely to be read as wholes, and telling such parts of the story in brief abstract as were ill managed in the drama. He thought it would not. I, however, am inclined to think it would.

The account of your indisposition gives me much concern. It pleases me, however, to see that, though you may suffer, your industry does not relax; and I hope that your pursuits are rather friendly than injurious to your health.

You are quite correct in your notice of my obligation to Dr. Darwin. In the first edition of the poem it was acknowledged in a note, which slipped out of its place in the last, along with some others. In putting together that edition, I was obliged to cut up several copies; and, as several of the poems also changed their places, some confusion and omission,

and, in one instance, a repetition, was the consequence. Nothing, however, so bad as in the edition of 1820, where a long poem, *The Lament of Mary Queen of Scots*, was by mistake altogether omitted. Another unpleasantness arose from the same cause; for, in some instances, notwithstanding repeated charges to the printer, you have only two Spenserian stanzas in a page (I speak now of the last edition) instead of three; and there is the same irregularity in printing other forms of stanza.

You must indeed have been fond of that ponderous quarto, *The Excursion*, to lug it about as you did. In the edition of 1827 it was diligently revised, and the sense in several instances got into less room; yet still it is a long poem for these feeble and fastidious times. You would honour me much by accepting a copy of my poetical works; but I think it better to defer offering it to you till a new edition is called for, which will be ere long, as I understand the present is getting low.

A word or two about Collins. You know what importance I attach to following strictly the last copy of the text of an author; and I do not blame you for printing in the *Ode to Evening* 'brawling' spring; but surely the epithet is most unsuitable to the time, the very worst, I think, that could have been chosen.

I now come to Lady Winchelsea. First, however let me say a few words upon one or two other authoresses of your *Specimens*. British poetesses make but a poor figure in the *Poems by Eminent Ladies*. But observing how injudicious that selection is in the case of Lady Winchelsea, and of Mrs. Aphra Behn (from whose attempts they are miserably copious), I have thought something better might have been chosen by more competent persons who had access to

the volumes of the several writers. In selecting from Mrs. Pilkington, I regret that you omitted (look at p. 255) *Sorrow*, or at least that you did not abridge it. The first and third paragraphs are very affecting. See also *Expostulation*, p. 258: it reminds me strongly of one of the Penitential Hymns of Burns. The few lines upon St. John the Baptist, by Mrs. Killigrew (vol. ii, p. 6), are pleasing. A beautiful Elegy of Miss Warton (sister to the poets of that name) upon the death of her father, has escaped your notice; nor can I refer you to it. Has the Duchess of Newcastle written much verse? her Life of her Lord, and the extracts in your book, and in the *Eminent Ladies*, are all that I have seen of hers. The *Mirth and Melancholy* has so many fine strokes of imagination, that I cannot but think there must be merit in many parts of her writings. How beautiful those lines, from 'I dwell in groves', to the conclusion, 'Yet better loved, the more that I am known', excepting the four verses after 'Walk up the hills'. And surely the latter verse of the couplet,

> The tolling bell which for the dead rings out;
> A mill where rushing waters run about;

is very noticeable: no person could have hit upon that union of images without being possessed of true poetic feeling. Could you tell me anything of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu more than is to be learned from Pope's letters and her own? She seems to have been destined for something much higher and better than she became. A parallel between her genius and character and that of Lady Winchelsea her contemporary (though somewhat prior to her) would be well worth drawing.

And now at last for the poems of Lady Winchelsea. I will transcribe a note from a blank leaf of my

own edition, written by me before I saw the scanty notice of her in Walpole. (By the by, that book has always disappointed me when I have consulted it upon any particular occasion.) The note runs thus: 'The *Fragment*, p. 280, seems to prove that she was attached to James II, as does p. 42, and that she suffered by the Revolution. The most celebrated of these poems, but far from the best, is *The Spleen*. *The Petition for an absolute Retreat*, and the *Nocturnal Reverie*, are of much superior merit. See also for favourable specimens, p. 156; *On the Death of Mr. Thynne*, p. 263; and p. 280 *Fragment*. The Fable of *Love, Death, and Reputation*, p. 29, is ingeniously told.' Thus far my own note. I will now be more particular. P. 3 *Our Vanity*, &c., and p. 163 are noticeable as giving some account from herself of her authorship. See also, p. 148, where she alludes to *The Spleen*. She was unlucky in her models, Pindaric Odes and French Fables. But see p. 70, *The Blindness of Elymas*, for proof that she could write with powers of a high order when her own individual character and personal feelings were not concerned. For less striking proofs of this power, see p. 4, 'All is Vanity,' omitting verses 5 and 6, and reading 'clouds that are lost and gone', &c. There is merit in the two next stanzas; and the last stanza towards the close contains a fine reproof for the ostentation of Louis XIV, and one magnificent verse,

Spent the astonished hours, forgetful to adore.

But my paper is nearly out. As far as 'For my garments', p. 36, the poem is charming; it then falls off; revives at p. 39, 'Give me there': p. 41, &c., reminds me of Dyer's *Grongar Hill*: it revives p. 47 towards the bottom, and concludes with sentiments worthy of

the writer, though not quite so happily expressed as other parts of the poem. See pages 82, 92, 'Whilst in the Muses' paths I stray'; p. 113. *The Cautious Lovers*, p. 118, has little poetic merit, but is worth reading as characteristic of the author. P. 143, 'Deep lines of honour,' &c., to 'maturer age'. P. 151 if shortened, would be striking; p. 154 characteristic; p. 159 from 'Meanwhile, ye living parents', to the close, omitting 'Nor could we hope', and the five following verses; p. 217 last paragraph; p. 259 *that* you have; pages 262, 263; p. 280. Was Lady W. a R. Catholic? p. 290. 'And to the clouds proclaim thy fall'; p. 291 omit 'When scatter'd glow-worms', and the next couplet. I have no more room. Pray, excuse this vile scrawl.

Ever faithfully yours,
W. W.

LETTER TO DYCE

(May, 1830)

Rydal Mount, Kendal, May 10, 1830.

My dear Sir,

My last was, for want of room, concluded so abruptly, that I avail myself of an opportunity of sending you a few additional words free of postage, upon the same subject.

I observed that Lady Winchelsea was unfortunate in her models—Pindarics and Fables; nor does it appear from her *Aristomenes* that she would have been more successful than her contemporaries, if she had cultivated tragedy. She had sensibility sufficient for the tender parts of dramatic writing, but in the stormy and tumultuous she would probably have

failed altogether. She seems to have made it a moral and religious duty to control her feelings lest they should mislead her. Of love, as a passion, she is afraid, no doubt from a conscious inability to soften it down into friendship. I have often applied two lines of her drama (p. 318) to her affections:

> Love's soft bands,
> His gentle cords of hyacinths and roses,
> Wove in the dewy spring when storms are silent.

By the by, in the next page are two impassioned lines spoken to a person fainting:

> Then let me hug and press thee into life,
> And lend thee motion from my beating heart.

From the style and versification of this, so much her longest work, I conjecture that Lady Winchelsea had but a slender acquaintance with the drama of the earlier part of the preceding century. Yet her style in rhyme is often admirable, chaste, tender, and vigorous, and entirely free from sparkle, antithesis, and that overculture, which reminds one, by its broad glare, its stiffness, and heaviness, of the double daisies of the garden, compared with their modest and sensitive kindred of the fields. Perhaps I am mistaken, but I think there is a good deal of resemblance in her style and versification to that of Tickell, to whom Dr. Johnson justly assigns a high place among the minor poets, and of whom Goldsmith rightly observes, that there is a strain of ballad-thinking through all his poetry, and it is very attractive. Pope, in that production of his boyhood, the *Ode to Solitude*, and in his *Essay on Criticism*, has furnished proofs that at one period of his life he felt the charm of a sober and subdued style, which

he afterwards abandoned for one that is, to my taste at least, too pointed and ambitious, and for a versification too timidly balanced.

If a second edition of your *Specimens* should be called for, you might add from Helen Maria Williams the *Sonnet to the Moon*, and that to *Twilight*; and a few more from Charlotte Smith, particularly,

I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night.

At the close of a sonnet of Miss Seward are two fine verses:

Come, that I may not hear the winds of night,
Nor count the heavy eave-drops as they fall.

You have well characterized the poetic powers of this lady; but, after all, her verses please me, with all their faults, better than those of Mrs. Barbauld, who, with much higher powers of mind, was spoiled as a poetess by being a dissenter, and concerned with a dissenting academy. One of the most pleasing passages in her poetry is the close of the lines upon *Life*, written, I believe, when she was not less than eighty years of age:

Life, we have been long together, &c.

You have given a specimen of that ever-to-be-pitied victim of Swift, 'Vanessa.' I have somewhere a short piece of hers upon her passion for Swift, which well deserves to be added. But I am becoming tedious, which you will ascribe to a well-meant endeavour to make you some return for your obliging attentions.

I remain, dear Sir, faithfully yours,

Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO A FRIEND

(1831)

Nov. 22, 1831.

My dear ——,

You send me showers of verses, which I receive with much pleasure, as do we all; yet have we fears that this employment may seduce you from the path of science, which you seem destined to tread with so much honour to yourself and profit to others. Again and again I must repeat, that the composition of verse is infinitely more of an *art* than men are prepared to believe; and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiae, which it grieves me you should stoop to acquire a knowledge of. Milton talks of 'pouring easy his unpremeditated verse'. It would be harsh, untrue, and odious, to say there is anything like cant in this; but it is not *true* to the letter, and tends to mislead. I could point out to you five hundred passages in Milton upon which labour has been bestowed, and twice five hundred more to which additional labour would have been serviceable. Not that I regret the absence of such labour, because *no poem* contains more proofs of skill acquired by practice.

. . . . . .

Shakspeare's sonnets (excuse this leaf) are not upon the Italian model, which Milton's are; they are merely quatrains with a couplet attached to the end, and if they depended much upon the versification they would unavoidably be heavy.

Wm. Wordsworth.

FROM A LETTER TO DYCE

(1833)

Rydal Mount, Kendal, Jan. 7, 1833.

My dear Sir,

Having an opportunity of sending this to town free of postage, I write to thank you for your last obliging letter. Sincerely do I congratulate you upon having made such progress with Skelton, a writer deserving of far greater attention than his works have hitherto received. Your edition will be very serviceable, and may be the occasion of calling out illustrations, perhaps, of particular passages from others, beyond what your own reading, though so extensive, has supplied. I am pleased also to hear that 'Shirley' is out.

Sincerely yours,

Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO DYCE

(1833)

Rydal Mount, March 20, 1833.

My dear Sir,

I have to thank you for the very valuable present of Shirley's works, just received. The preface is all that I have yet had time to read. It pleased me to find that you sympathized with me in admiration of the passage from the Duchess of Newcastle's poetry; and you will be gratified to be told that I have the opinion you have expressed of that cold and false-hearted Frenchified coxcomb, Horace Walpole.

Poor Shirley! what a melancholy end was his! and then to be so treated by Dryden! One would almost suspect some private cause of dislike, such as is said to have influenced Swift in regard to Dryden himself.

Shirley's death reminded me of a sad close of the life of a literary person, Sanderson by name, in the neighbouring county of Cumberland. He lived in a cottage by himself, though a man of some landed estate. His cottage, from want of care on his part, took fire in the night. The neighbours were alarmed; they ran to his rescue; he escaped, dreadfully burned, from the flames, and lay down (he was in his seventieth year) much exhausted under a tree, a few yards from the door. His friends, in the meanwhile, endeavoured to save what they could of his property from the flames. He inquired most anxiously after a box in which his manuscripts and published pieces had been deposited with a view to a publication of a laboriously-corrected edition; and, upon being told that the box was consumed, he expired in a few minutes, saying, or rather sighing out the words, 'Then I do not wish to live.' Poor man! though the circulation of his works had not extended beyond a circle of fifty miles diameter, perhaps, at furthest, he was most anxious to survive in the memory of the few who were likely to hear of him.

The publishing trade, I understand, continues to be much depressed, and authors are driven to solicit or invite subscriptions, as being in many cases the only means for giving their works to the world.

I am always pleased to hear from you; and believe me,

My dear Sir,
Faithfully your obliged friend,
Wm. Wordsworth.

LETTER TO DYCE

[*No date to this Letter, but written in* 1833.]

My dear Sir,

The dedication[1] which you propose I shall esteem as an honour; nor do I conceive upon what ground, but an over-scrupulous modesty, I could object to it.

Be assured that Mr. Southey will not have the slightest unwillingness to your making any use you think proper of his *Memoir of Bampfylde*: I shall not fail to mention the subject to him upon the first opportunity.

You propose to give specimens of the best *sonnet-writers* in our language. May I ask if by this be meant a selection of the *best sonnets*, *best* both as to *kind* and *degree*? A sonnet may be excellent in its kind, but that kind of very inferior interest to one of a higher order, though not perhaps in every minute particular quite so well executed, and from the pen of a writer of inferior genius. It should seem that the best rule to follow would be, first, to pitch upon the sonnets which are best *both* in kind and perfectness of execution, and, next, those which, although of a humbler quality, are admirable for the finish and happiness of the execution; taking care to exclude all those which have not one or other of these recommendations, however striking they might be, as characteristic of the age in which the author lived, or some peculiarity of his manner. The tenth sonnet of Donne, beginning 'Death, be not proud,' is so eminently characteristic of his manner, and at the same time so weighty in the thought, and vigorous in the expression, that I would entreat you to insert

[1] I had requested permission to dedicate a little book, *Specimens of English Sonnets*, to Mr. W.—A. D.

it, though to modern taste it may be repulsive, quaint, and laboured. There are two sonnets of Russell, which, in all probability, you may have noticed, 'Could, then, the babes,' and the one upon *Philoctetes*, the last six lines of which are firstrate. Southey's *Sonnet to Winter* pleases me much; but, above all, among modern writers, that of Sir Egerton Brydges, upon *Echo and Silence*. Miss Williams's *Sonnet upon Twilight* is pleasing; that upon *Hope* of great merit.

Do you mean to have a short preface upon the construction of the sonnet? Though I have written so many, I have scarcely made up my own mind upon the subject. It should seem that the sonnet, like every other legitimate composition, ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an end; in other words, to consist of three parts, like the three propositions of a syllogism, if such an illustration may be used. But the frame of metre adopted by the Italians does not accord with this view; and, as adhered to by them, it seems to be, if not arbitrary, best fitted to a division of the sense into two parts, of eight and six lines each. Milton, however, has not submitted to this; in the better half of his sonnets the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now, it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense unity in which the excellence of the sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist. Instead of looking at this composition as a piece of architecture, making a whole out of three parts, I have been much in the habit of preferring the image of an orbicular body,—a sphere, or a dew-drop. All this will appear to you a little fanciful; and I am well aware that a sonnet will often be found excellent,

where the beginning, the middle, and the end are distinctly marked, and also where it is distinctly separated into *two* parts, to which, as I before observed, the strict Italian model, as they write it, is favourable. Of this last construction of sonnet, Russell's upon *Philoctetes* is a fine specimen; the first eight lines give the hardship of the case, the six last the consolation, or the *per-contra*.

Ever faithfully
Your much obliged friend and servant,
W. Wordsworth.

P. S. In the case of the Cumberland poet, I overlooked a most pathetic circumstance. While he was lying under the tree, and his friends were saving what they could from the flames, he desired them to bring out the box that contained his papers, if possible. A person went back for it, but the bottom dropped out, and the papers fell into the flames and were consumed. Immediately upon hearing this, the poor old man expired.

REMINISCENCES

August 26, 1841.—Wordsworth made some striking remarks on Goethe in a walk on the terrace yesterday. He thinks that the German poet is greatly overrated, both in this country and his own. He said, 'He does not seem to me to be a great poet in either of the classes of poets. At the head of the first class I would place Homer and Shakspeare, whose universal minds are able to reach every variety of thought and feeling without bringing their own individuality before the reader. They infuse, they breathe life into every object they approach, but you never find *themselves*. At the head of the second class, those whom you can trace individually

in all they write, I would place Spenser and Milton. In all that Spenser writes you can trace the gentle affectionate spirit of the man; in all that Milton writes you find the exalted sustained being that he was. Now in what Goethe writes, who aims to be of the first class, the *universal*, you find the man himself, the artificial man, where he should not be found; so that I consider him a very artificial writer, aiming to be universal, and yet constantly exposing his individuality, which his character was not of a kind to dignify. He had not sufficiently clear moral perceptions to make him anything but an artificial writer.

November, 1843.—Wordsworth holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive; and he said to-day that if the quantity of time consumed in writing critiques on the works of others were given to original composition, of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed; it would make a man find out sooner his own level, and it would do infinitely less mischief. A false or malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others; a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless.

July 11, 1844.—Mr. Price sat next to Mr. Wordsworth, and, by design or fortunate accident, introduced some remark on the powers and the discourse of Coleridge. Mr. Wordsworth entered heartily and largely on the subject. He said that the liveliest and truest image he could give of Coleridge's talk was, 'that of a majestic river, the sound or sight of whose course you caught at intervals, which was sometimes concealed by forests, sometimes lost in sand, then came flashing out broad and distinct, then again took a turn which your eye could not follow, yet you knew and felt that it was the same river: so,' he said, 'there was always a train, a stream, in Coleridge's

discourse, always a connection between its parts in his own mind, though one not always perceptible to the minds of others. Mr. Wordsworth went on to say, that in his opinion Coleridge had been spoilt as a poet by going to Germany. The bent of his mind, which was at all times very much to metaphysical theology, had there been fixed in that direction. 'If it had not been so,' said Wordsworth, 'he would have been the greatest, the most abiding poet of his age. His very faults would have made him popular (meaning his sententiousness and laboured strain), while he had enough of the essentials of a poet to make him deservedly popular in a higher sense.'

. . . . . .

Mr. Price soon after mentioned a statement of Coleridge's respecting himself, recorded in his *Table Talk*, namely, that a visit to the battle-field of Marathon would raise in him no kindling emotion, and asked Mr. Wordsworth whether this was true as a token of his mind. At first Mr. Wordsworth said, 'Oh! that was a mere bravado for the sake of astonishing his hearers!' but then, correcting himself, he added, 'And yet it might in some sense be true, for Coleridge was not under the influence of external objects. He had extraordinary powers of summoning up an image or series of images in his own mind, and he might mean that his idea of Marathon was so vivid, that no visible observation could make it more so.' 'A remarkable instance of this', added Mr. Wordsworth, 'is his poem, said to be "composed in the Vale of Chamouni". Now he never was at Chamouni, or near it, in his life.' Mr. Wordsworth next gave a somewhat humorous account of the rise and progress of the *Ancient Marinere*. 'It arose', he said, 'out of the want of five pounds which Coleridge and I needed to make

a tour together in Devonshire. We agreed to write jointly a poem, the subject of which Coleridge took from a dream which a friend of his had once dreamt concerning a person suffering under a dire curse from the commission of some crime.' 'I', said Wordsworth, 'supplied the crime, the shooting of the albatross, from an incident I had met with in one of Shelvocke's voyages. We tried the poem conjointly for a day or two, but we pulled different ways, and only a few lines of it are mine.' From Coleridge, the discourse then turned to Scotland. Mr. Wordsworth, in his best manner, with earnest thoughts given out in noble diction, gave his reasons for thinking that, as a poet, Scott would not live. 'I don't like', he said, 'to say all this, or to take to pieces some of the best reputed passages of Scott's verse, especially in presence of my wife, because she thinks me too fastidious; but as a poet Scott *cannot* live, for he has never in verse written anything addressed to the immortal part of man. In making amusing stories in verse, he will be superseded by some newer versifier; what he writes in the way of natural description is merely rhyming nonsense.' As a prose writer, Mr. Wordsworth admitted that Scott had touched a higher vein, because there he had really dealt with feeling and passion. As historical novels, professing to give the manners of a past time, he did not attach much value to those works of Scott's so called, because that he held to be an attempt in which success was impossible. This led to some remarks on historical writing, from which it appeared that Mr. Wordsworth has small value for anything but contemporary history. He laments that Dr. Arnold should have spent so much of his time and powers in gathering up and putting into imaginary shape the scattered fragments of the history of Rome.

July 12*th*, 1844.—Wordsworth spoke much during the evening of his early intercourse with Coleridge, on some one observing that it was difficult to carry away a distinct impression from Coleridge's conversation, delightful as every one felt his outpourings to be. Wordsworth agreed, but said he was occasionally very happy in clothing an idea in words; and he mentioned one which was recorded in his sister's journal during a tour they all made together in Scotland. They passed a steam engine, and Wordsworth made some observation to the effect that it was scarcely possible to divest oneself of the impression on seeing it that it had life and volition. 'Yes,' replied Coleridge, 'it is a giant with one idea.'

. . . . . .

He discoursed at great length on Scott's works. His poetry he considered of that kind which will always be in demand, and that the supply will always meet it, suited to the age. He does not consider that it in any way goes below the surface of things; it does not reach to any intellectual or spiritual emotion; it is altogether superficial, and he felt it himself to be so. His descriptions are not true to nature; they are addressed to the ear, not to the mind. He was a master of bodily movements in his battle-scenes; but very little productive power was exerted in popular creations.

October, 1846.—He entered his protest as usual against ——'s style, and said that since Johnson no writer had done so much to vitiate the English language. He considers Lord Chesterfield the last good English writer before Johnson. Then came the Scotch historians, who did infinite mischief to style, with the exception of Smollett, who wrote good pure English. He quite agreed to the saying that all great poets wrote good prose; he said there was not one exception. He does not think Burns's prose

equal to his verse, but this he attributes to his writing his letters in English words, while in his verse he was not trammelled in this way, but let his numbers have their own way.

Undated.—He thought the charm of *Robinson Crusoe* mistakenly ascribed, as it commonly is done, to its *naturalness*. Attaching a full value to the singular yet easily imagined and most picturesque circumstances of the adventurer's position, to the admirable painting of the scenes, and to the knowledge displayed of the working of human feelings, he yet felt sure that the intense interest created by the story arose chiefly from the extraordinary energy and resource of the hero under his difficult circumstances, from their being so far beyond what it was natural to expect, or what would have been exhibited by the average of men; and that similarly the high pleasure derived from his successes and good fortunes arose from the peculiar source of these uncommon merits of his character.

I have heard him pronounce that the Tragedy of *Othello*, Plato's records of the last scenes of the career of Socrates, and Isaac Walton's *Life of George Herbert*, were in his opinion the most pathetic of human compositions.

He spoke with great animation of the advantage of classical study, Greek especially. 'Where', said he, 'would one look for a greater orator than Demosthenes; or finer dramatic poetry, next to Shakspeare, than that of Aeschylus and Sophocles, not to speak of Euripides?' Herodotus he thought 'the most interesting and instructive book, next to the Bible, which had ever been written'. Modern discoveries had only tended to confirm the general truth of his narrative. Thucydides he thought less of.

OPINIONS EXPRESSED

IN CONVERSATION WITH HIS NEPHEW AND BIOGRAPHER

Undated.—'The first book of Homer appears to be independent of the rest. The plan of the *Odyssey* is more methodical than that of the *Iliad*. The character of Achilles seems to me one of the grandest ever conceived. There is something awful in it, particularly in the circumstance of his acting under an abiding foresight of his own death. One day, conversing with Payne Knight and Uvedale Price concerning Homer, I expressed my admiration of Nestor's speech, as eminently natural, where he tells the Greek leaders that *they* are mere children in comparison with the heroes of *old* whom *he* had known. "But", said Knight and Price, "that passage is spurious!" However, I will not part with it. It is interesting to compare the same characters (Ajax, for instance) as treated by Homer, and then afterwards by the Greek dramatists, and to mark the difference of handling. In the plays of Euripides, politics come in as a disturbing force: Homer's characters act on physical impulse. There is more *introversion* in the dramatists: whence Aristotle rightly calls him τραγικώτατος. The tower-scene, where Helen comes into the presence of Priam and the old Trojans, displays one of the most beautiful pictures anywhere to be seen. Priam's speech on that occasion is a striking proof of the courtesy and delicacy of the Homeric age or at least, of Homer himself.

'Catullus translated literally from the Greek; succeeding Roman writers did not so, because Greek had then become the fashionable, universal language. They did not translate, but they paraphrased; the

ideas remaining the same, their dress different. Hence the attention of the poets of the Augustan age was principally confined to the happy selection of the most appropriate words and elaborate phrases; and hence arises the difficulty of translating them.

'The characteristics ascribed by Horace to Pindar in his ode, "Pindarum quisquis," &c. are not found in his extant writings. Horace had many lyrical effusions of the Theban bard which we have not. How graceful is Horace's modesty in his "Ego *apis* Matinae More modoque," as contrasted with the Dircaean Swan! Horace is my great favourite: I love him dearly.

'I admire Virgil's high moral tone: for instance, that sublime "Aude, hospes, contemnere opes," &c. and "his dantem jura Catonem!" What courage and independence of spirit is there! There is nothing more imaginative and awful than the passage,

——Arcades ipsum
Credunt se vidisse Jovem, &c.

'In describing the weight of sorrow and fear on Dido's mind, Virgil shows great knowledge of human nature, especially in that exquisite touch of feeling,

Hoc visum nulli, *non ipsi effata sorori.*

The ministry of Confession is provided to satisfy the natural desire for some relief from the load of grief. Here, as in so many other respects, the Church of Rome adapts herself with consummate skill to our nature, and is strong by our weaknesses. Almost all her errors and corruptions are abuses of what is good.

'I think Buchanan's *Maiae Calendae* equal in sentiment, if not in elegance, to anything in Horace; but your brother Charles, to whom I repeated it the other day, pointed out a false quantity in it. Happily this had escaped me.

'When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction, that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton. These I must study, and equal *if I could*; and I need not think of the rest.'

'I have been charged by some with disparaging Pope and Dryden. This is not so. I have committed much of both to memory. As far as Pope goes, he succeeds; but his Homer is not Homer, but Pope.

'I cannot account for Shakspeare's low estimate of his own writings, except from the sublimity, the superhumanity, of his genius. They were infinitely below his conception of what they might have been, and ought to have been.

'The mind often does not think, when it thinks that it is thinking. If we were to give our whole soul to anything, as the bee does to the flower, I conceive there would be little difficulty in any intellectual employment. Hence there is no excuse for obscurity in writing.

'*Macbeth* is the best conducted of Shakspeare's plays. The fault of *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Lear* is, that the interest is not, and by the nature of the case could not be, sustained to their conclusion. The death of Julius Caesar is too *overwhelming* an incident for *any* stage of the drama but the *last*. It is an incident to which the mind clings, and from which it will not be torn away to share in other sorrows. The same may be said of the madness of Lear. Again, the opening of *Hamlet* is full of exhausting interest. There is more mind in *Hamlet* than any other play; more knowledge of human nature. The first Act is incomparable. . . . There is too much of an every-day sick room in the death-bed

scene of Catherine, in *Henry the Eighth* — too much of leeches and apothecaries' vials. . . . *Zanga* is a bad imitation of *Othello*. Garrick never ventured on Othello: he could not submit to a blacked face. He rehearsed the part once. During the rehearsal Quin entered, and, having listened for some time with attention, exclaimed, "Well done, David! but where's the teakettle?" alluding to the print of Hogarth, where a black boy follows his mistress with a teakettle in his hand. . . . In stature Garrick was short. . . . A fact which conveys a high notion of his powers is, that he was able to *act out* the absurd stage-costume of those days. He represented Coriolanus in the attire of Cheapside. I remember hearing from Sir G. Beaumont, that while he was venting, as Lear, the violent paroxysms of his rage in the awful tempest scene, his wig happened to fall off. The accident did not produce the slightest effect on the gravity of the house, so strongly had he impregnated every breast with his own emotions.

'Some of my friends (H. C. for instance) doubt where poetry on contemporary persons and events can be good. But I instance Spenser's *Marriage*, and Milton's *Lycidas*. True, the *Persae* is one of the worst of Aeschylus's plays; at least, in my opinion.

'Milton is falsely represented by some as a democrat. He was an aristocrat in the truest sense of the word. See the quotation from him in my *Convention of Cintra*. Indeed, he spoke in very proud and contemptuous terms of the populace. *Comus* is rich in beautiful and sweet flowers, and in exuberant leaves of genius; but the ripe and mellow fruit is in *Samson Agonistes*. When he wrote that, his mind was Hebraized. Indeed, his genius fed on the writings of the Hebrew prophets. This arose, in

some degree, from the temper of the times; the Puritan lived in the Old Testament, almost to the exclusion of the New.

'The works of the old English dramatists are the gardens of our language.

'One of the noblest things in Milton is the description of that sweet, quiet morning in the *Paradise Regained*, after that terrible night of howling wind and storm. The contrast is divine.'

1827.—'T. Moore has great natural genius; but he is too lavish of brilliant ornament. His poems smell of the perfumer's and milliner's shops. He is not content with a ring and a bracelet, but he must have rings in the ears, rings on the nose—rings everywhere.

'Walter Scott is not a careful composer. He allows himself many liberties, which betray a want of respect for his reader. For instance, he is too fond of inversions; i. e. he often places the verb before the substantive, and the accusative before the verb. W. Scott quoted, as from me,

> The swan on *sweet* St. Mary's lake
> Floats double, swan and shadow,

instead of *still*; thus obscuring my idea, and betraying his own uncritical principles of composition.

'Byron seems to me deficient in *feeling*. Professor Wilson, I think, used to say that *Beppo* was his best poem; because all his faults were there brought to a height. I never read the *English Bards* through. His critical prognostications have, for the most part, proved erroneous.

'Sir James Mackintosh said of me to M. de Staël, "Wordsworth is not a great poet, but he is the greatest man among poets." Madame de Staël complained of my style.

'Now whatever may be the result of my experiment

in the subjects which I have chosen for poetical composition—be they vulgar or be they not,—I can say without vanity, that I have bestowed great pains on my *style*, full as much as any of my contemporaries have done on theirs. I yield to none in *love for my art*. I, therefore, labour at it with reverence, affection, and industry. My main endeavour, as to style, has been that my poems should be written in pure intelligible English. Lord Byron has spoken severely of my compositions. However faulty they may be, I do not think that I ever could have prevailed upon myself to print such lines as he has done; for instance,

> I stood at Venice on the Bridge of Sighs,
> A palace and a prison on each hand.

Some person ought to write a critical review, analysing Lord Byron's language, in order to guard others against imitating him in these respects.

'Shelley is one of the best *artists* of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.'

Undated.—'S——, in the work you mentioned to me, confounds *imagery* and *imagination*. Sensible objects really existing, and felt to exist, are *imagery*; and they may form the materials of a descriptive poem, where objects are delineated as they are. Imagination is a subjective term: it deals with objects not as they are, but as they appear to the mind of the poet.

'The imagination is that intellectual lens through the medium of which the poetical observer sees the objects of his observations, modified both in form and colour; or it is that inventive dresser of dramatic *tableaux*, by which the persons of the play are invested with new drapery, or placed in new attitudes; or it is that chemical faculty by which elements of the most different nature and distant

origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole.

'A beautiful instance of the modifying and *investive* power of imagination may be seen in that noble passage of Dyer's *Ruins of Rome*, where the poet hears the voice of Time; and in Thomson's description of the streets of Cairo, expecting the arrival of the caravan which had perished in the storm.

'Read all Cowley; he is very valuable to a collector of English sound sense. . . . Burns's *Scots wha ha'e* is poor as a lyric composition.

'Ariosto and Tasso are very absurdly depressed in order to elevate Dante. Ariosto is not always sincere; Spenser always so.

'I have tried to read Goethe. I never could succeed. Mr. —— refers me to his *Iphigenia*, but I there recognize none of the dignified simplicity, none of the health and vigour which the heroes and heroines of antiquity possess in the writings of Homer. The lines of Lucretius describing the immolation of Iphigenia are worth the whole of Goethe's long poem. Again, there is a profligacy, an inhuman sensuality, in his works which is utterly revolting. I am not intimately acquainted with them generally. But I take up my ground on the first canto of *Wilhelm Meister*; and, as the attorney-general of human nature, I there indict him for wantonly outraging the sympathies of humanity. Theologians tell us of the degraded nature of man; and they tell us what is true. Yet man is essentially a moral agent, and there is that immortal and unextinguishable yearning for something pure and spiritual which will plead against these poetical sensualists as long as man remains what he is.'

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